

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF
SCANDINAVIA

*
VOLUME I
Prehistory to 1520

This volume presents a comprehensive exposition of both the prehistory and medieval history of the whole of Scandinavia. The first part of the volume surveys the prehistoric and historic Scandinavian landscape and its natural resources, and tells how man took this landscape into possession, adapting culturally to changing natural conditions and developing various types of community throughout the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages. The rest – and most substantial part of the volume – deals with the history of Scandinavia from the Viking Age to the end of the Scandinavian Middle Ages (c. 1520). The external Viking expansion opened Scandinavia to European influence to a hitherto unknown degree. A Christian church organisation was established, the first towns came into being, and the unification of the three medieval kingdoms of Scandinavia began, coinciding with the formation of the unique Icelandic 'Free State'.



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Prehistory to 1520

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Edited by
KNUT HELLE
University of Bergen



PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Dante 10.5/13 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 47299 7 hardback

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General Editors' preface

Cambridge Histories have become an established *genre* of collective scholarship. In this tradition *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, in three volumes, presents to readers worldwide the current state of historical knowledge about Scandinavia from the beginnings to the present. It is the first full-scale exposition of the whole area.

The General Editors have thought it wise that, apart from essential 'scene-setting', the volume should contain both general comparative chapters on major themes in Scandinavian history and chapters on the individual histories of constituent countries. As far as possible Scandinavia is presented as a whole with an attempted balance between economic, social and political developments. Special attention is given to cultural and religious matters and their history is seen in the light of the general history of Scandinavia. The General Editors' hope is that the reader will have, as the outcome, an authoritative history, based on the most recent research.

The General Editors have many specific debts to acknowledge. In particular, the late Sir Geoffrey Elton, Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge, Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Professor Emeritus of History at Harvard University, and the late Professor Robert W. Scribner of Clare College, Cambridge, and Harvard helped and encouraged them in launching the project of a Cambridge History of Scandinavia. William Davies of Cambridge University Press has for his part provided constant encouragement as he has skilfully overseen the planning and production of the series.

The General Editors gratefully acknowledge the generous financial assistance from the Nordic Cultural Fund towards the publication of these volumes. They also wish to thank the various archives, libraries and other institutions for granting permission to publish material from their collections, and to thank most sincerely the translators and secretaries who have helped in the preparation of this series.

General editor's preface

Lastly, the remaining General Editors are sad to have to communicate the death of their senior colleague, Professor Erling Ladewig Petersen, on 21 June 1999. Without his initiative and scholarly standing the series would hardly have come about; and failing health did not keep him from continuing, energetically, his editorial work to the very last.

Knut Helle
Torkel Jansson
E. I. Kouri

Volume Editor's preface

No fewer than twenty-eight scholars have contributed to the present volume. Consequently, it has been a time-consuming process to collect all contributions, have most of them translated into English, and cast them together in a hopefully not too incoherent volume. Yet the work would have been much harder without the authors' willingness to accommodate the editor when he felt he had to propose rearrangements in adapting chapters and sub-chapters to the overall plan of the volume. Sadly, three of the contributors have not lived to see their valuable work appear in print: Dr Ingrid De Geer (d. 1995), Professor Lars Hamre (d. 1999) and Professor Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (d. 2001).

In editing the volume I have received inestimable assistance from Professor Peter Sawyer who has carefully read all the contributions, improved their English and commented constructively on their contents. My thanks are also due to Cand. Philol. Martha Knapskog, who compiled the bibliography, and to Caroline Bundy of Cambridge University Press who has made life easier for me by skilfully overseeing the production of the volume.

It is the aim of the volume to impart up-to-date knowledge of Scandinavian prehistory and medieval history. It should, however, be noticed that the considerable time taken to collect, edit and produce the tome has made it impossible to do full justice to research work published since the mid-1990s. Nor has it been possible, within the allotted space, to consider all aspects of Scandinavian prehistory and medieval history that have attracted research in recent decades. Priority has had to be given to what in the eyes of the volume editor and the various contributors constitutes basic knowledge of main themes. Each of these themes has been treated comparatively for the whole of Scandinavia by one and the same author, often with helpful comments from other contributors. However, when dealing with the emergence of the three Scandinavian kingdoms and the Icelandic Free State in the Viking Age and early Middle Ages (Part II), and the development towards nationally organised

systems of government in the high Middle Ages (Part IV), a division into 'national' chapters following a comparative introduction seemed the natural solution.

The forms of Scandinavian personal and geographic names in an English text cause special problems. Traditionally anglicised forms constitute only a very small part of all the proper names that will have to be used. For the sake of consistency, and partly also for the sake of colouring, proper names will therefore, with very few exceptions, occur in their Scandinavian forms, as they would today be written in vernacular representations of history.

With regard to personal names, this will in some cases entail the writing of one and the same name in slightly varying 'national' forms, such as Oluf (Danish) – Ólafur (Icelandic) – Olaf (Norw.) – Olof (Swedish), or Ingeborg (Danish and Swedish) – Ingibjörg (Icelandic) – Ingebjørg (Norw.). In geographic names the forms of *The Times Atlas of the World, Comprehensive Edition* will be adopted with only few exceptions. This means that present-day state borders will determine written forms of names of provinces and places whose nationality has shifted over the years, so that for instance formerly Norwegian Jemtland will be written as Swedish Jämtland and formerly Danish Slesvig as German Schleswig. Traditionally anglicised names such as Scania and Jutland, Copenhagen and Gothenburg will have to give way to Skåne and Jylland, København and Göteborg, respectively. The Scandinavian vowels *å* and *ø/ö* occurring here, in other cases also *æ/ä*, cannot in any case be avoided and non-Scandinavian readers will need to get used to them. Geographic names that do not occur in *The Times Atlas*, among them quite a few historical names, will be presented in their traditional national forms.

Knut Helle

Introduction

KNUT HELLE

The word 'Scandinavia' first occurs in the *Naturalis historia* of Pliny the Elder (d. AD 79), in the form of *Scadinavia* or *Scatinavia*. In later manuscripts of this work an *n* was added in the first syllable and the name became *Scandinavia*, as it still is. Pliny used the name to denote what he believed to be a large island in the Baltic. As the basis for his original Latin version of the name, a Germanic form **Skapin-aujō* or **Skadīn-aujō* has been reconstructed. The last part of this compound, meaning 'land on the water' or 'island', causes no difficulty, but the interpretation of the first element is disputed. Half a score of conjectures have been suggested. One of the more plausible ones, accepted by some of the leading scholars in the field, is that the first part is derived from the Germanic stem of **skadan* – 'danger, damage'. Scandinavia would then originally mean 'the dangerous land on the water' or 'the dangerous island'.

Pliny also refers to a group of islands in the north called *Scandiae*. In the following century they reappear in the geographical writings of Ptolemy. He places the four islands of *Skandiai* east of Jylland (Jutland) and singles out the largest and most easterly as the proper *Skandia*. This is clearly Skåne (Scania), the southernmost region of present-day Sweden, and the territory north of it; the other three and smaller *Skandiai* would be Danish islands. It appears, then, that Pliny's *Scadinavia* was also one of the islands which he called *Scandiae*. He composed his work from different traditions, and this may explain his use of two names for the same 'island'. The original Latin form of *Scandia/-ae* may have been **Scadnia/-ae*, in which *dn* was later transformed into *nd* by metathesis. *Scandia/-ae*, too, would then originally refer to one or more 'dangerous' islands, and the transformation of *Scadinavia* into *Scandinavia* in the younger Pliny manuscripts may have been caused by contamination with *Scandiae*. The danger that may originally have been implied by both names, *Scadinavia* as well as *Scandia/-ae*, has been explained as that caused by the reefs and sandbanks which threatened seafarers on their way between Kattegat

and the Baltic, above all the long reef of Falsterbo off the southwestern tip of Skåne.¹

Whatever the original meaning of the name Scandinavia, we may conclude that it was used by classical authors in the first centuries of the Christian era to identify Skåne and the mainland further north which they believed to be an island. If the last part of the name is derived from Germanic *-aujō*, the original meaning would be 'land on the water' rather than 'island'; it is not likely that Germanic-speaking people familiar with the southern part of the Scandinavian peninsula would conceive of that territory as an island.²

In the region itself Scandinavia (see Map 1) is today generally held to consist of more than the Scandinavian peninsula: for historical and cultural reasons Denmark is added to the peninsular states of Norway and Sweden. Mutually intelligible languages of common Germanic origin are spoken within this region and the histories of the three countries are closely interwoven. In the Middle Ages the kingdom of Denmark included the southernmost provinces of what is now Sweden – Skåne, Blekinge and Halland – and the kingdom of Norway comprised the present-day Swedish provinces of Bohuslän, Jämtland and Härjedalen. This was a territorial situation that was to last until the mid-seventeenth century when all these provinces were ceded to Sweden. Norway shared its king with Sweden from 1319 to 1355 and with Denmark from 1380 to 1814; for parts of the late Middle Ages Sweden, too, including Finland, belonged to the latter union.

Present-day Finland came gradually under Swedish rule from the mid-twelfth century as a result of Swedish religious and political expansion. In the early fourteenth century the Swedish-speaking province of Åland (Ahvenanmaa) was incorporated in the Finnish bishopric of Turku (Åbo).

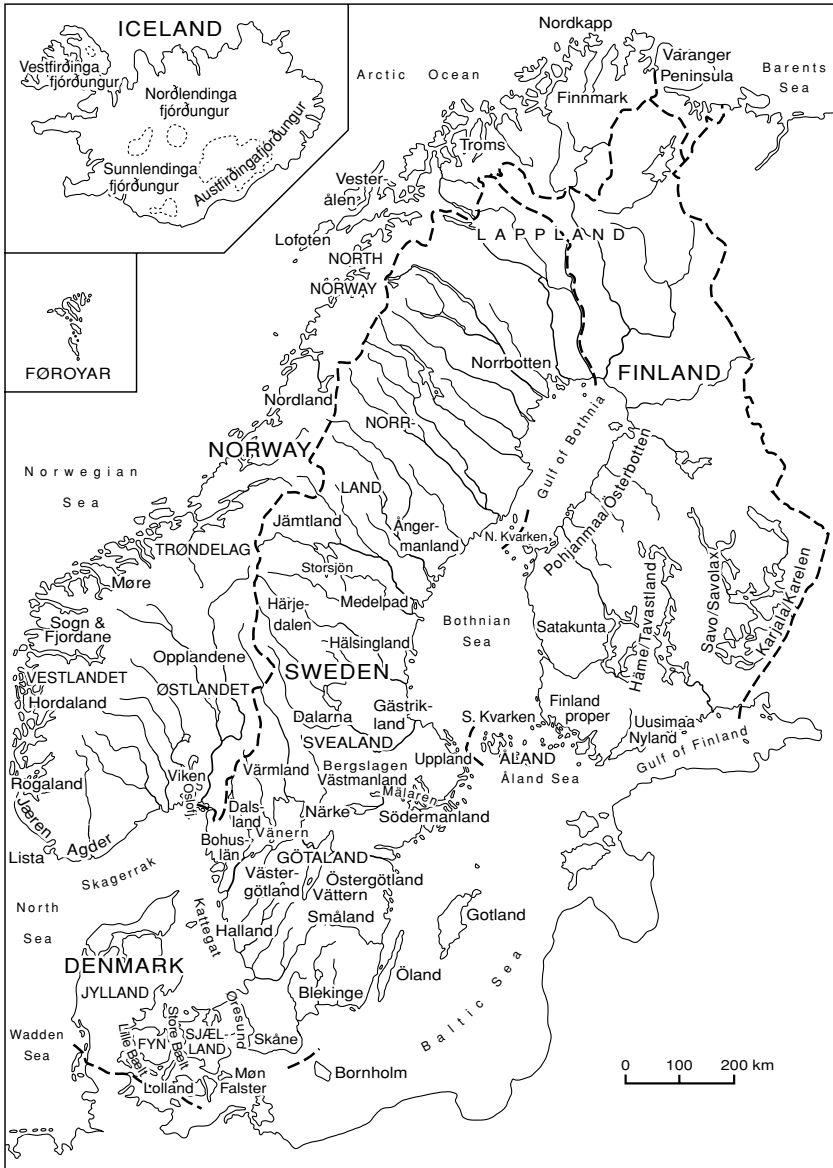
Iceland and Føroyar (Faeroes) were settled by Norse colonists in the Viking Age and were, together with the small Norse colonies in Greenland, placed under the Norwegian crown in the first part of the 1260s. All these 'tributary lands' followed Norway into the union with Denmark in 1380 but stayed under Danish overlordship when Norway entered the union with Sweden in 1814.

Altogether, the communities mentioned – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Åland, Føroyar and Greenland – conceive of themselves as parts of the larger region called *Norden*, 'the North', in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish (in Finnish *Pohjola*, in Icelandic *Norðurlönd*). They share much of

1 J. Svennung, *Scadinavia und Scandia: Lateinisch-nordische Namenstudien* (*Acta Societatis Litterarum Humaniorum Regiae Upsaliensis*, 44:1, Uppsala, 1963).

2 V. Skånland, 'J. Svennung: Scadinavia und Scandia', *Maal og Minne* (1968), pp. 155–6.

Introduction



Map 1 Scandinavia

their history and display many common traits of culture, one of them being the kinship of the native languages – with the exceptions of Finnish in Finland and some parts of northern Sweden, Sami (Lappish) in the northernmost part of the Scandinavian peninsula and parts of Finland, and Greenlandic and other Inuit dialects in Greenland.

The term *Norden* has not so far taken root in English. The tendency has rather been to expand the concept of Scandinavia to include all the communities which conceive of themselves as 'Nordic'. This has been helped by the fact that these communities, notwithstanding their internal differences, show a common geographical, historical and socio-cultural distinctness from the rest of Europe. It is precisely this distinctness that lies behind the idea of a comprehensive and comparative history of Scandinavia which is carried into effect in the present volume and the two following volumes of *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*. The Scandinavia of this title, then, stands for what the Scandinavians themselves call *Norden*/*Pohjola*/*Norðurlönd*. In the following historical representation the terms Scandinavia and Scandinavian will be used in this wide sense. We find it convenient to use the adjectives 'Scandinavian' and 'Nordic' more or less synonymously whereas the term *Norden* will normally only occur when dealt with in its own historical context.

The present volume deals with the development of Scandinavian communities up to and including the Middle Ages, here ending in about 1520, which is considered the start of the early Modern Period treated in the next volume. It should at the outset be noted that due to the scarcity of written evidence the prehistory of Scandinavia stretches well into the early Middle Ages of European history. Up to about AD 800 it is therefore customary to divide Scandinavian history into archaeological periods. Such periods, like the subdivisions of the following historic Middle Ages, tend to vary from country to country, both in their nomenclature and their chronological delimitations. The matter is further complicated by a tendency in recent archaeological research to modify time-honoured chronological limits in order to bring them into accordance with new finds and revised dates of older ones.

In the following account of Scandinavian prehistory and medieval history a common standard of periodisation will be attempted. The system chosen will not completely correspond to the national conventions of any single Scandinavian country, but up to and including the Iron Age it will generally follow the Danish system, from which the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish systems do not radically deviate. Denmark is the region closest to the rest of Europe, from which Scandinavia was influenced throughout the whole of its

prehistory. New cultural developments frequently occurred first in Denmark and then spread to other parts of Scandinavia. The Danish archaeological system of dating will therefore generally reflect the earliest traces of important cultural changes. Because of its closeness to other European periodisation systems it will also be easily understood by non-Scandinavian readers.

In broad outline, Scandinavian prehistory is still divided into the three fundamental, material-oriented periods first proposed by the Danish archaeologist C. J. Thomsen (d. 1865): Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. Within the Stone Age the division at about 4000 BC between an early (late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic) and a late (Neolithic) period is particularly important since the latter saw the introduction of agriculture and animal husbandry in Scandinavia. There is little reason to change the conventional boundary between the Scandinavian Stone and Bronze Ages which stands at about 1800 BC. Even if copper and bronze had been imported into Scandinavia for centuries before that, it was certainly around 1800 BC that imports of metal into Scandinavia reached a high level and the Scandinavians themselves started to smelt and cast bronze.

The starting point of the Scandinavian Iron Age is now generally placed at about 500 BC, but it should be noticed that the earliest working of iron can be dated from about 800–700 BC (Chapter 3). The Iron Age is usually subdivided into periods with names and time limits which to some extent vary from country to country. In accordance with Danish practice divisions will generally be drawn between a pre-Roman (Celtic) Iron Age (500–1 BC), a Roman Iron Age (AD 1–400), and a Germanic Iron Age (AD 400–800). The latter will be further subdivided into the Migration and Merovingian Periods (AD 400–600 and 600–800, respectively), as is usually the case in Norwegian archaeology (lately with AD 550 as an alternative dividing year).

The following Viking Age is the transitional period between Scandinavian prehistory and history. Written evidence now starts to shed light not only on the activities of Scandinavians abroad but also on important aspects of some of the Scandinavian communities. Nevertheless, archaeological material continues to constitute the bulk of evidence on which a representation of cultural and societal development within Scandinavia must be based. Since the earliest known Viking raids on western Europe occurred in the 790s it is customary to place the beginning of the Viking Age in about 800 but there is an ongoing debate whether the starting point ought to be pushed back half a century or so. In the light of Viking activity abroad, the end of the Viking Age is usually placed at about AD 1000 or 1050. When important new internal developments in Scandinavia are taken into consideration, such as the earliest steps towards

consolidation of the medieval kingdoms and the official, ruler-supported conversion to Christianity, AD 1000 would seem to be the more suitable turning point between the Viking Age and the early Christian Middle Ages.

Thus, in the present volume the Scandinavian Middle Ages will encompass the period between c. AD 1000 and c. 1520. They will be subdivided into an early, a central and a late part. The central or 'high' Middle Ages are characterised by the organisation of centralised kingdoms in Scandinavia and of corresponding church provinces, as well as by significant intellectual and artistic developments that were stimulated by the high medieval culture of western Europe in a fertile interplay with native traditions. The dividing line between the early and high Middle Ages in Scandinavia is placed at about 1150, while the starting point of the late Middle Ages is the watershed in demographic and societal development that was caused by the Black Death in 1349–50.

That 1520 is chosen as the point of division between the Middle Ages and the early Modern Period has partly to do with the 'Stockholm Massacre' in that year, which definitely put an end to the late medieval efforts to establish a union of all three Scandinavian kingdoms. By ending the volume at about 1520 also makes it possible, in the next volume, to treat coherently the two processes that above all mark the beginning of the early Modern Period in Scandinavia: the Lutheran Reformation and the growth of stronger territorial kingdoms. It should, however, be noted that in Danish and Norwegian history 1536–7 are commonly considered the dividing years between the Middle Ages and the early Modern Period as they marked the end of Norway's formal position as a kingdom in its own right and the decisive break-through of the Lutheran Reformation in the two countries.

Scandinavia in the wide sense covers some 12 per cent of the total European landmass (about 1.3 million out of 10.5 million sq. km), whereas its population in 1994 only numbered a little more than 3 per cent of the European total (23.7 million out of about 735 million people). These quantitative relations at once draw attention to the fact that the great expanse of Scandinavia – stretching across almost 17 degrees of latitude between North Cape and southernmost Denmark, roughly the distance from the Danish border to the southern tip of Sicily – is, and always has been, sparsely populated by European standards. Most of the land – consisting of mountains and mountain plateaux, glaciers, forests on meagre soils, moorland, bogs and fens – has to this day been left virtually untouched by sedentary settlement.

Nevertheless, as natural conditions for human habitation vary greatly within Scandinavia – in particular between coast and interior, high- and

low-lying areas, north and south – settlement has, since the introduction of agriculture, been relatively dense in most of what constitutes present-day Denmark, southern and central Sweden, and the low-lying areas of Norwegian Østlandet and Trøndelag, as well as in parts of coastal Sweden, Finland and Norway, where most of the natural resources that have always attracted a permanent agricultural population are found. With the passage of time this settlement pattern has been reinforced by the urbanisation and industrialisation that have occurred primarily in the same areas.

It is thus fitting that Part I of this comprehensive history of Scandinavia should begin with a presentation of the prehistoric and historic Scandinavian landscape and its natural resources (Chapter 1), and continue with the story of how people took this landscape into possession, adapting culturally to changing natural conditions, developing various types of community (Chapters 2 and 3), and eventually also creating cultural identities associated with the earliest forms of Indo-European and Finno-Ugrian speech in Scandinavia (Chapter 4).

With regard to geology and landforms the Scandinavian landscape had attained most of its present shape when it was first entered by reindeer hunters from the south some 14,000 years ago, following the retreating continental ice margin after the last glaciation of the Quaternary Period. But natural conditions were still to be transformed by momentous climatic changes in the following millennia, causing land uplift in some areas, flooding in others, continued sedimentation, and changes to vegetation and animal life.

Towards the end of the warm and humid Atlantic Era (about 4000 BC), when hunters, fishers and gatherers had invaded most of Scandinavia and were moving in greater or smaller groups across the land, people in the far south of the region began to practise agriculture, thus marking the start of the Neolithic Period or late Stone Age of Scandinavian prehistory. In the course of this period and the following Bronze Age – when the climate changed to the Sub-Boreal type, but was still quite favourable with warm and dry summers – arable farming became the principal economy of southern Scandinavia and of coastal districts further north, as far as southern Troms in Norway and the head of the Gulf of Bothnia in Finland. Pastoral farming spread even further north and inland, but here hunting and fishing were still the main means of subsistence, and remained so as the climate gradually turned cooler and damper and attained its present Sub-Atlantic character in the pre-Roman Iron Age.

At the beginning of the Iron Age Scandinavia had thus become the meeting place of two contrasting cultural traditions – agrarian societies in the south

and hunting societies in the north (and parts of the interior further south). Culturally, the agrarian societies can be divided into two main groups. In Denmark, in Norway as far north as Trøndelag, in Sweden as far north as the Mälars valley, and in the Baltic islands of Bornholm, Öland and Gotland, there was a stable settlement pattern of villages and farmsteads, which in a number of ways resembled the contemporary culture of what is now northern Germany. To link archaeologically defined cultural entities to linguistic ones is a hazardous business but we can nevertheless be fairly certain that by the beginning of the Iron Age the agriculturalists of southern Scandinavia had been Indo-European speakers for a long time, possibly since the third millennium BC, and that they were then developing Germanic forms of language which may be defined as proto-Scandinavian.

At the same time the coastal districts of southern and western Finland were inhabited by agriculturalists whose material culture resembled that found around the Gulf of Finland and in the east Baltic region. In the west they were influenced by the Scandinavians and appear to have received Germanic loanwords from them, but they probably spoke forms of the Baltic Finnic that developed into the later Finnish dialects. They were not, however, the first Finno-Ugrian or Uralic speakers in the region. Very little is certain about the prehistoric language situation in Finland and various hypotheses have been put forward, but Finnish researchers now tend to assume that Uralic or proto-Finnic speaking people were present in Finland at least from the Bronze Age and possibly from the late Stone Age (the Typical Comb Ceramic culture, see Chapter 2); it has even been argued that they may have been there since the end of the last glaciation.

In the Viking Age it is clear that the Sami (Lapps) formed a distinct hunting and fishing culture in northern Scandinavia, with their own forms of language, but how far back this culture extends is a much debated problem. Earlier – when the Sami were commonly thought to have migrated to northern Scandinavia as a distinct population group, with its own physical appearance, language and cultural identity – one hypothesis was that their ancestors were the first Finno-Ugrian speakers to arrive in Finland but that they later retreated northwards in the face of the expansion of Baltic Finnic speaking people. Nowadays researchers tend to assume that Sami identity and speech gradually developed among hunting and fishing groups in the north as a consequence of a uniform way of life, different from that of neighbouring populations. The linguistic differentiation between proto-Finnic and proto-Sami is by some thought to have developed in Finland in the late Stone Age and Bronze Age, reflecting a cultural split into a primarily farming community, influenced from the east

Baltic and southern Scandinavia, and a primarily hunting inland community without such external contacts.

At any rate, as late as the pre-Roman Iron Age many features of the Sami culture known from the early Modern Period seem to have been established and were developing further in the hunting and fishing communities of northernmost Scandinavia, accompanied by a differentiation between proto-Sami and proto-Scandinavian speech in northern Norway and northern Sweden. What appears to have been a continuous development of such communities from as far back as the northern slate and metal culture of the late Stone Age and Bronze Age may also indicate that the ethnic identity of the Sami was already starting to develop in those periods.

In the survey of the Iron Age (Chapter 3) the main line of argument is that Scandinavia in this period changed from being a separate region in Europe to becoming a border area, first to the Roman Empire and then to the Frankish kingdom. Because Scandinavian resources were in demand in the major centres of continental Europe opportunities were opened for political leaders who were able to supply Europe with northern goods, and Scandinavia was at the same time exposed to strong influences and a certain pressure from Europe. In southern Scandinavia it is assumed that stratified Bronze Age chiefdoms were replaced in the pre-Roman Iron Age by comparatively egalitarian tribal and kin-based communities which in the following phases of the Iron Age developed into warlike chiefdoms and petty kingdoms in close interaction with the Roman Empire and the later Germanic kingdoms of the continent and the British Isles. Thus, it is argued, the ground was prepared for the Viking expansion from the end of the eighth century.

The Roman and Germanic Iron Age of Scandinavia is represented as a period of continuous material expansion, marked by growth in population, settlement, and the exploitation of outlying areas. Doubt is cast on the earlier assumption that there was a marked, albeit passing, decrease in population and contraction of settlement in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, caused by plague and various other factors (though the crisis hypothesis cannot so far be said to have been refuted, and still has its adherents). In southern Scandinavia it is assumed that there was a change from communally-run villages in the pre-Roman Iron Age to private ownership of land and livestock in the following centuries so that part of the farming population became tenants. Contributions from this population constituted the main economic basis of the élite of an increasingly stratified society – chieftains and magnates who enhanced their social standing by possessing imported prestige products, often preserved as grave goods.

Due to their geographical situation Danish chiefdoms and petty kingdoms played a key role in the political and economic interaction between Scandinavia and the continent. They took advantage not only of the resources available in their own region but gradually also drew larger areas of northern Scandinavia into their network of political alliances and economic exchange, including chiefdoms as far north as Lofoten/Vesterålen in Norway, Medelpad/Ångermanland in Sweden, and parts of Finland. The northernmost chiefdoms are believed to have suppressed, but partly also cooperated with, the Sami population in order to procure the hunting products in demand further south.

The Germanic Iron Age saw the development of thoroughly Scandinavian forms of language. The more rapid and economic speech that emerged after the so-called 'syncope period' AD 550–750 is often known as Common Scandinavian, but it appears that there were already at this stage differences between the dialects of East Nordic (spoken in Denmark and Sweden) and West Nordic (spoken in Norway and later in the Norse communities of the Atlantic), and that within East Nordic the speech of Jylland and Sjælland was diverging from that of Götaland and eastern Sweden.

Though the connection is far from clear, such linguistic features were probably associated with the development of larger and more powerful political units in Scandinavia – Norwegian and Swedish petty kingdoms or chiefdoms with centres such as Borre west of Oslofjord and Old Uppsala in central Sweden and above all a strong eighth-century Danish kingdom with its centre in Jylland, confronting the expanding Franks to the south. The eighth century also saw the establishment of the first Nordic trading centres corresponding to those that had earlier been established in the Channel area, such as Ribe in Jylland from the beginning of the century, later Kaupang at Oslofjord in Vestfold, Birka in Lake Mälaren, and Hedeby at the base of Jylland. These emporia were nodal points in an economic exchange which involved all areas around the North Sea and the Baltic, and the political powers controlling them were in close and perhaps hostile interaction with their Germanic counterparts on the continent and in the British Isles. Consequently, the unrest of the Viking Age could have its roots in economic and political conflicts around the North Sea in the preceding century.

That the commercial expansion in north-west Europe in the preceding century was an important condition for the outburst of Viking piracy from the end of the eighth century seems clear, but it is at present a matter of debate whether the first recorded incursions on the coasts of the British Isles and the Continent were more than sporadic plundering raids. In contrast to the

long-standing conflict between Danes and Franks there is so far no clear evidence of close interaction between the Germanic and Christian kingdoms of the British Isles and Scandinavia prior to the first known Viking raids. Consequently, it has not been possible to substantiate the argument that the raids were organised by Scandinavian rulers in order to counteract what was believed to be threats from those kingdoms. At any rate, the raids were soon followed by territorial conquests and colonisation which made a lasting impact on both western and eastern Europe. Part II of this volume therefore starts with a chapter devoted to the external Viking expansion (Chapter 5).

Associated with this expansion was a material and spiritual culture that was, for the most part, common to all the Scandinavian-speaking populations and conditioned not least by the fact that their territories were almost completely surrounded by water. Communication by boat or ship was the favoured way of maintaining contacts internally and necessary for interaction with the rest of Europe; consequently, the development of sailing ships was a prerequisite for Viking expansion. Society was predominantly agricultural and clearly stratified, with slaves as the lowest stratum and a warlike aristocracy at its head. The polytheistic religion was a household religion, closely woven into life and culture – and, unlike Christianity, lacking a professional clergy and, apparently, largely without specialised cult buildings. The Scandinavian runic script was used for inscriptions and probably also for short messages but hardly to record literature; Viking literature was oral, consisting of mythical Eddic poems and metrically intricate skaldic verse. Fondness for decoration led to a vital ornamental and figurative art, mainly adorning functional objects of every kind (Chapter 6).

Viking culture was influenced from the territories conquered and colonised abroad, and from a Scandinavian viewpoint the importance of the external expansion was, above all, that it opened Scandinavia to Europe to an hitherto unknown degree. Christian influences seriously began to make themselves felt, and led to what amounted to a cultural revolution. After missionary endeavours in the ninth and tenth centuries the official conversion of the Scandinavian populations took place under the leadership of Christian kings, starting with the conversion of the Danish king Harald Gormsson in the 960s. In the course of the eleventh century the first elements of a Christian church organisation, with permanent bishops' seats and cathedrals, were introduced (Chapter 7).

Scandinavians abroad in the Viking Age also became aware of more sophisticated forms of political organisation under royal or princely leadership. This was part of the background for the main thrust of political development

in Scandinavia during the late Viking Age and early medieval period: the emergence of the three kingdoms of the region – Denmark, Norway and Sweden – all of them precursors of the later national states. Norse communities were also permanently established in Føroyar and Iceland whereas such communities in the British Isles and Greenland did not survive the Middle Ages. From the mid-twelfth century the incorporation of Finland into the Swedish realm was started by Swedish missionary and military activity in Finland proper (Chapter 8).

In the late Viking and early Middle Ages Scandinavia also entered the world of script. It is therefore possible, from the twelfth century onwards, to construct a more coherent and detailed Scandinavian history than that outlined so far. The account of Scandinavian medieval history up to about 1520 is here divided into five main parts (III–VII). Two of them deal with political events and political organisation in the high and late Middle Ages (Parts IV and VII). Each of these is preceded by a part outlining the societal background to political events in the form of demography, rural and urban settlement, economy, and social structure (Parts III and VI). Centrally placed in the volume is a set of chapters on high and late medieval Scandinavian spiritual and material culture – ideologies and mentalities, literature, architecture, art, handicrafts and music (Part V). The Conclusion to the volume brings together and emphasises the main developments of the high and late medieval history of Scandinavia.

PART I

*

THE GEOGRAPHY AND
PREHISTORY OF
SCANDINAVIA

The Scandinavian landscape and its resources

ULF SPORRONG

In a representation of history, the landscape should be thought of as being continually influenced by people. It can be seen as the tangible and characteristic result of the interaction between a specific society, its cultural preferences and potential, and the physio-geographical conditions. Human intelligence exercises a decisive influence on the ecological balance of the landscape, to store knowledge and to organise the use of natural resources. For that reason, much of the landscape has been dominated by human influence over the centuries, and should therefore be regarded as a part of cultural history.

The agrarian landscape provides an excellent illustration of this line of thought. Before agriculture became industrialised the farming population was affected by and was dependent on the conditions dictated by nature. The natural landscape was gradually transformed into a cultural landscape which, depending on natural conditions, varies from region to region.

The natural landscape can be likened to a chessboard. Man himself makes the rules of the game to suit his social and economic needs; he determines how natural resources are to be used. What the chessboard looks like is primarily dependent on geology, the landforms, climate, hydrology and soil conditions. Let us therefore start by considering some of the main physical characteristics of the Scandinavian landscape throughout the millennia that have passed since the Quaternary glaciations.¹

1 For the geography of Scandinavia, see particularly J. Abrahamsen et al., *Naturgeografisk inndeling av Norden* (Helsingfors, 1977); C. Fredén (ed.), *National Atlas of Sweden: Geology* (Stockholm, 1994); *Natur- og kulturlandskapet i planleggingen*, 1, *Regioninndeling av landskap* (Nordisk Ministerråd, Miljørapport, 1987:3); *The Nordic Environment – Present State, Trends and Threats* (Nordic Council of Ministers, Nord, 1993:12, Copenhagen); B. Sjöberg (ed.), *National Atlas of Sweden: Sea and Coast* (Stockholm, 1992); A. Sømme (ed.), *A Geography of Norden* (Oslo, 1960).

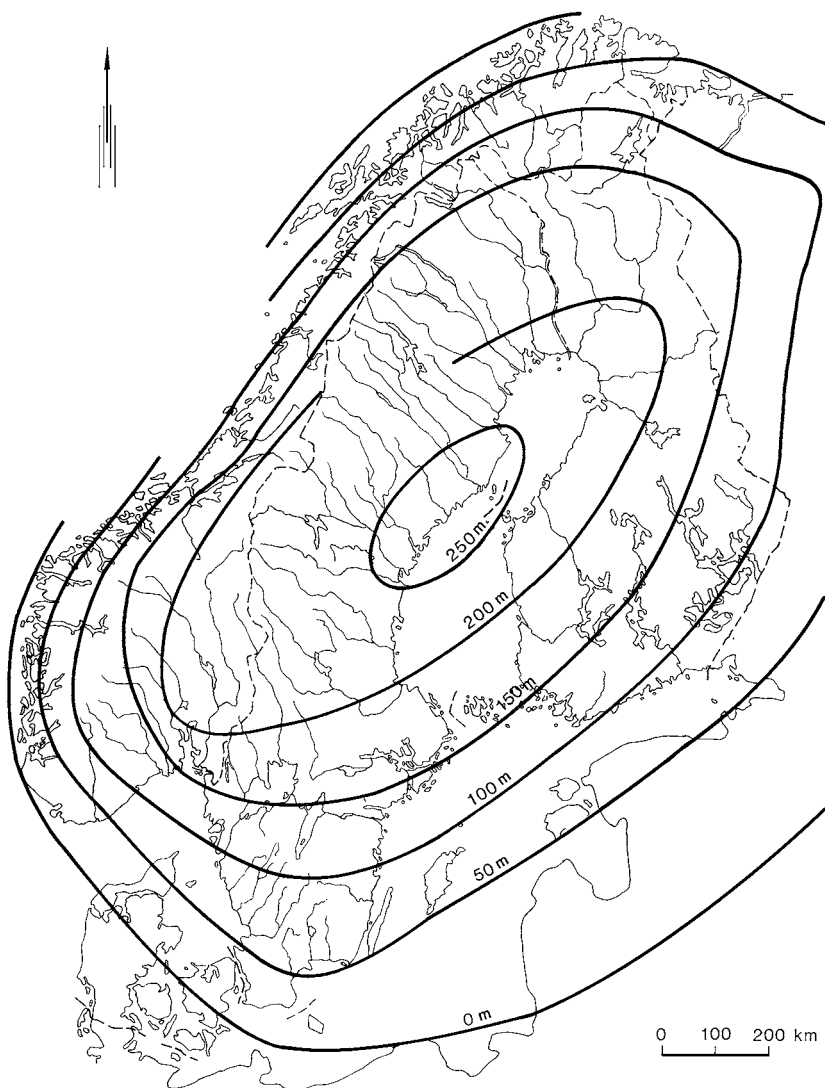
The shaping of the Scandinavian landscape

One can say, without much exaggeration, that it was the nature of the bedrock that once determined whether man could cultivate the land in Scandinavia. Conditions were especially favourable to the development of fertile soil where the bedrock was rich in calcium, as in Skåne and Denmark in particular.

A number of physical processes were responsible not only for the geological construction of the Scandinavian landscape but also for the later changes that took place; for example, the formation of mountain ranges and the weathering and erosion which created a layer of soil with characteristic landforms. 'Constructive' forces always work hand in glove with 'destructive' ones whose tools are running water, wind and ice. Vast changes in the Nordic landscape have taken place several times during the eons of time – roughly 2,000 million years – over which it was formed. But it was the most recent eras that created some of its most important and detailed features, the main landforms of the bedrock during the Tertiary and enormous quantities of loose deposits during the glaciations of the Quaternary Period. Large masses of rock were torn loose, cracks and weak zones hollowed out, bedrock was worn smooth, loose material was transported by the ice and deposited elsewhere in the form of till or left as sediments by the subglacial rivers and the sea.

The sea level varied during different stages in the recession of the inland ice. One effect of the heavy ice cover was to depress the land. Consequently, during the ice recession vast areas were at first covered by the sea. The highest post-glacial sea level, the so-called 'highest shoreline', varies in the Scandinavian countries in proportion to the thickness and weight of the former ice cover. It is highest in the region of eastern Norrland in Sweden (285 m above the present-day shoreline) and lowest in Skåne and Denmark. The subsequent land uplift (Map 2) has been particularly important around the Baltic where the coastline is still changing and new land is emerging. The effects of this are most apparent in eastern Svealand (the region around Stockholm), southwestern Finland, the eastern shore of the Gulf of Bothnia, and the lower parts of many river valleys around the gulf.

Land uplift has also been significant in the southern coastal regions of Norway, though it is less marked than around the Baltic. Conversely, land is today actually sinking in relation to the sea level in Skåne and Denmark. In Iceland the sea level changed at various stages during the recession of the ice and large areas of what is now *terra firma* once lay below sea level. The highest Icelandic shoreline varies between 40 and 100 m above the present sea level. It is the southern coast in particular that has been affected by shore displacement.



Map 2 Land uplift in relation to present sea level

In many places the highest shoreline forms a sharp dividing line in the Nordic rural landscape, especially around the Baltic and the Gulf of Bothnia. Above this line the sea never abraded the finer sediment which made cultivation possible where the glacial till permitted it. On the highest shoreline (and on exposed slopes below this line) there is an abrasion zone that is infertile, at least for arable. Below the highest shoreline the abraded material has become sediment on the floor of fjords and bays. This low-lying sediment has for a long time provided new cultivable land as the sea receded.

The wearing down of the bedrock surface by weathering and erosion has not been equally extensive everywhere. Consequently, the major features of the landscape vary from fairly level bedrock plains in Finland and southern Sweden (peneplains) to mountains, often dramatic in shape, along the Scandinavian mountain range, especially in Norway (the Caledonides).

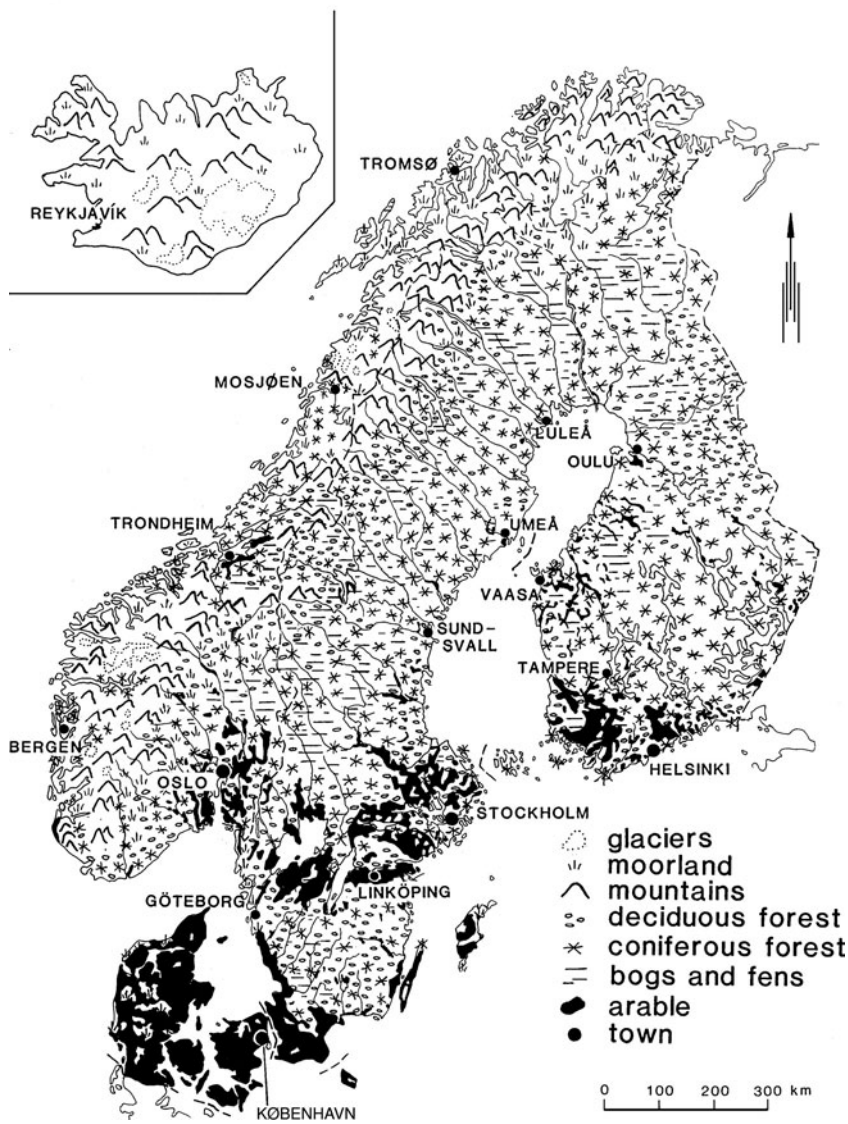
Weathering and sedimentation are also responsible for more detailed features of the landscape. The bedrock is often covered by a layer of soil, generally deposited during and after the last Ice Age. This is the material on which people were mainly dependent for growing food, most predominant in Denmark and southern Sweden where glacial deposits have shaped the landscape.

Whether the land was suited to cultivation depended on the composition of the soil, the climate and the altitude, and the same factors have determined the natural vegetation. Consequently, the degree to which the land was cultivable varied greatly from place to place, as did the natural vegetation. It is this combination of natural vegetation and cultivated plants that continues to give the Nordic landscape its special character.

Vegetation also plays an important part in the chemical and physical processes that influence the biosphere (land, air and water). The natural vegetation of Scandinavia can be assigned to different zones according to the prevailing climate, the altitude, access to nutrients and water. But vegetation also passes through different stages of development, from newly colonising seedlings to primeval forest. These successive stages make their imprint on the visual landscape, and were very important for the environment in which people first began to cultivate land. A rough presentation of the Scandinavian landscape and its natural resources is shown in Map 3.

Geology and landforms

The northern and north-western parts of Scandinavia are separated from the southernmost parts in Skåne and Denmark by the so-called Tornquist Zone,



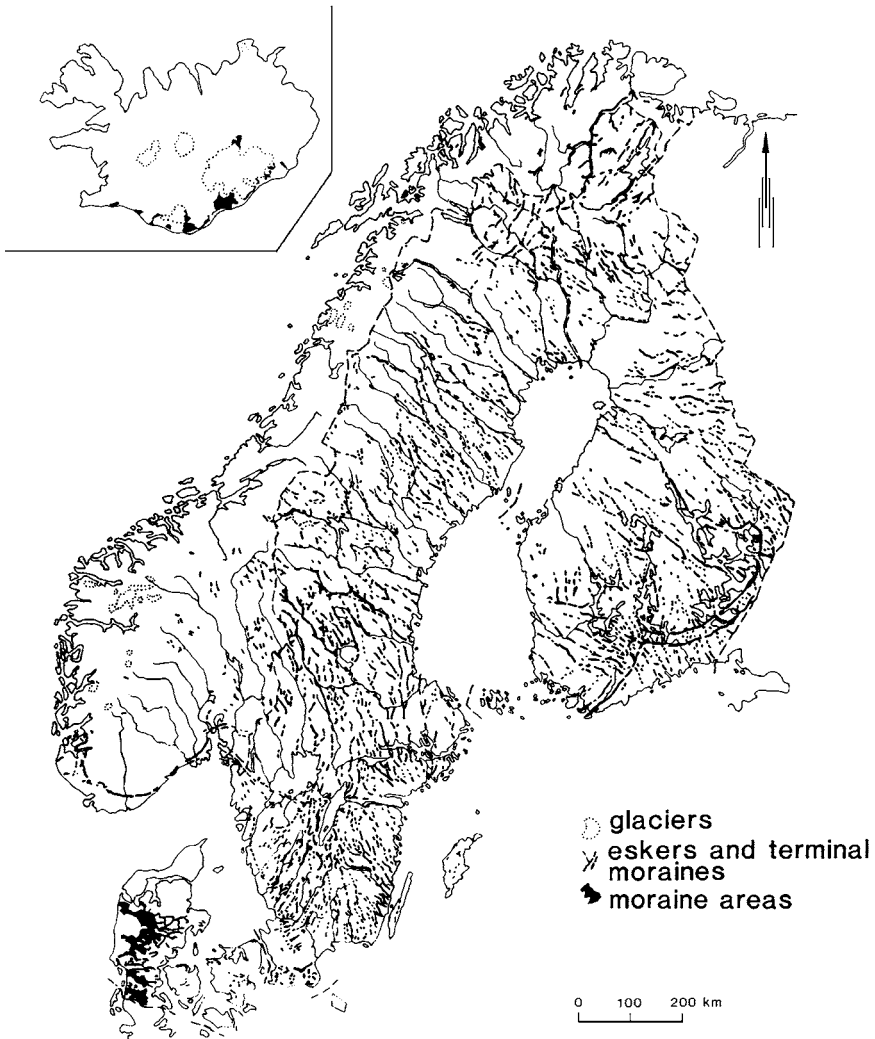
Map 3 Land use

south of which a considerable area of western Europe consists of low-lying depressions. To the north, the Fenno-Scandian Precambrian bedrock begins, divided by the Caledonides. To the south, the landscape is dominated by sedimentary rock formations consisting of sandstone, slate and limestone.

This boundary obviously determines the character of the landscape and also the ability of the inhabitants to make use of its natural resources. The south is dominated by a cultivated landscape, the north by vast forests. The Fenno-Scandian Precambrian bedrock was, however, once covered by sedimentary rock (e.g. Cambrian, Ordovician and Silurian). Much of this was removed by erosion, but where it remained it gave rise to a rich clay which has been used for cultivation and permanent settlements for millennia (for example, Falbygden in Västergötland). The remains of such sedimentary rock are to be found in several other places in the south of Sweden, in south-eastern Norway, and beneath the Gulf of Bothnia. In mountainous regions the sedimentary rock was transformed when the mountain ranges were formed about 300 million years ago. The Cambro-Silurian area of Jämtland is an exception to this rule: here a rich agricultural district developed from the late Iron Age onwards.

Much of the soil of northern Scandinavia, however, consists of coarser till on which it is difficult to raise crops. Nevertheless, cultivation is possible here and there, particularly on land lying above the highest shoreline. Moraines that were deposited in front of the ice dammed up low-lying land and valleys, thus creating the lake landscapes that are so typical of Scandinavia, especially those of northern Sweden and Finland. The most distinct band of terminal moraines in the Fenno-Scandinavian ice-marginal zone runs from the ridges (Norw. *ra*) on either side of the Oslofjord through south-central Sweden to Salpausselkä in Finland. In tunnels and crevasses in the ice, eskers were formed from glaciofluvial sediments which had been sorted by meltwater. Such ridges are characteristic of the landscape in Sweden and Finland, and provided good routeways and well-drained sites for early settlements (Map 4).

In Denmark and Skåne there are both younger Mesozoic and Tertiary rocks. Denmark is largely built up of clay, marl and sand from the Tertiary Period. Moreover, the loose surface layer of soil is notable here for the large quantities of till and meltwater sediments that were deposited by the ice during the Quaternary glaciations. The landscape of Jylland, which was only partially covered by ice during the last glaciation, has largely been shaped by the water-borne material from the inland ice to the north. In western Jylland the remains of material from earlier glaciations rise in the form of hills (Danish *bakkeøer* – 'hill islands') over the flatter areas of outwash from the last glaciation. These plains (Danish *hedesletter*) not only constitute the core of the famous Jylland



Map 4 Glacial deposits

moorlands but they also witnessed the earliest cultivation in Scandinavia. The sculpturing and relief of the Danish landscape is almost wholly determined by these young geological formations.

Iceland differs in every respect from the other Scandinavian countries because the island is situated on the Atlantic Ridge where the earth's crust is

actively moving. The island is composed mostly of volcanic rocks which produce a relatively poor soil.

Map 5 shows the geomorphology of Scandinavia and indicates the wide variability in the degree to which the land can be cultivated. Denmark and parts of southernmost Skåne are dominated by loose deposits. This explains the often hilly countryside, shaped by massive deposits of till and meltwater material and by the action of outwash from the melting glacial ice.

From the geological point of view, most of the rest of southern Sweden, parts of east-central Sweden, and large areas of western Finland consist of plains. The land rarely varies more than 20 m in height. On the Swedish and Finnish mainland the bedrock of these plains is Precambrian while the large islands in the Baltic have almost flat or only gently dipping sedimentary rock.

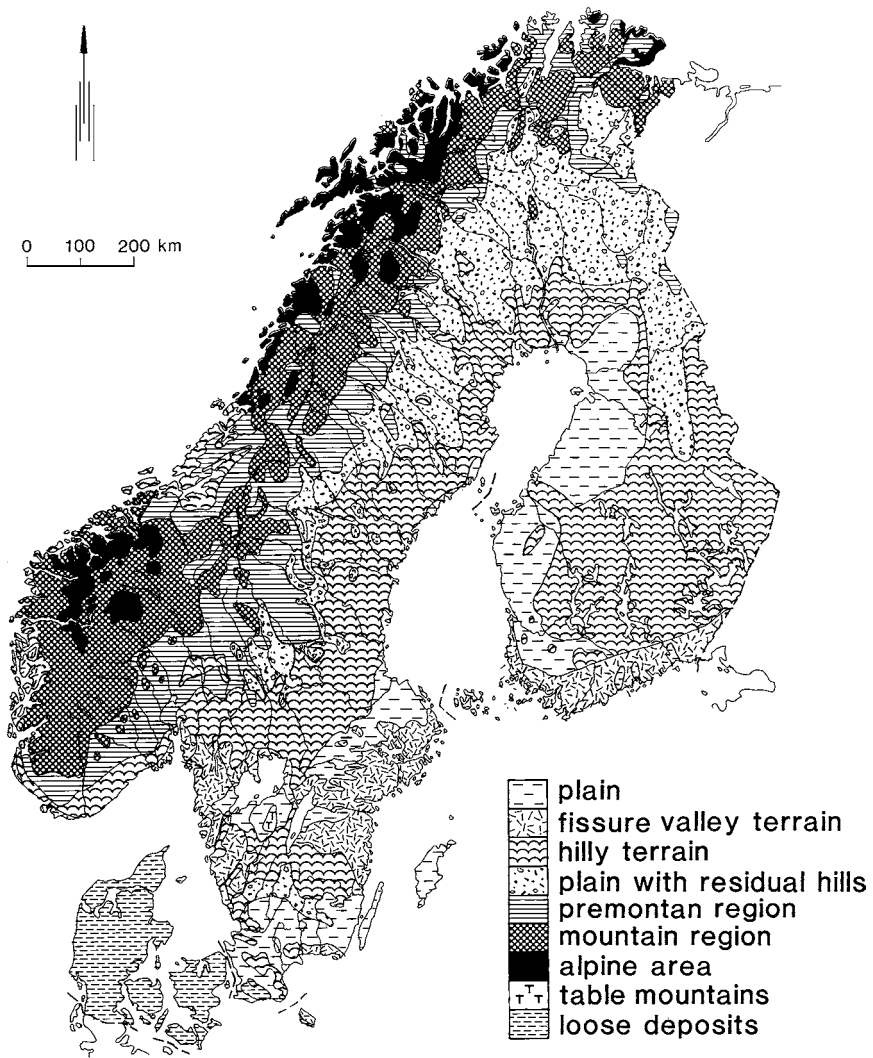
In the interior of southern Sweden the South Swedish Highlands stretch northwards. This is a plain with residual hills, which means that there are considerable differences in height, sometimes up to 100 m.

In the large depression running through south-central Sweden and the south of Finland, including Åland, there are fissure valley terrains. Tectonic movements over millions of years produced fissures that broke down the even surface of the primeval rock. The fissures then underwent weathering by the action of water and ice, and now form a pattern of straight valleys, often cultivated, in a landscape that is otherwise covered with till and forest. The landscape here may be likened to a mosaic.

North of the depression, in the interior of Finland as well as in large parts of central and northern Sweden and the southernmost areas of Norway, the undulating hilly terrain recurs, now often with greater variations in height – in Sweden and Norway frequently more than 100 m. The land has given rise to a majestic forest landscape which in Sweden forms the boundary of what is called the Norrland terrain. This was for a long time little more than wilderness and agrarian settlement came late. In the very northernmost part of Sweden and Finland differences in height are often smaller and the scattered mountain peaks reach a similar altitude all across the landscape. These regions are termed *bergkullslätter* in Swedish, that is, plains with residual hills.

To the west, along the Atlantic coast, the Scandinavian mountain range rises from its foothills. In the extreme west the mountains are alpine in character and where they meet the sea a dramatic fjord landscape has arisen. In some places there are strips of flat land between the mountains and the sea (Norw. *strandflater*). These areas invited early settlers.

The Scandinavian landscape and its resources



Map 5 Geomorphology

The Precambrian Shield contains numerous and varied mineral resources. Apart from at Spitsbergen, the younger geological formations that provide coal, oil and oil schists occur only at great depths along the Norwegian coast and less abundantly in Skåne and Denmark. Iron ores occur in the central and northern parts of Scandinavia, in Norway and Sweden. Those of Bergslagen in central Sweden have been mined for centuries; the deposits are numerous and small, and are almost devoid of phosphorus. Formerly, this gave Swedish steel an unrivalled quality. The iron ores of northern Sweden are concentrated in a few large deposits in Lappland and have only been mined more recently, mainly for export. The ores here are rich with very high iron contents.

Other minerals are of less economic value today. Nevertheless, Norway has quite rich pyrite deposits used for copper production, and in northern Sweden, mainly in Västerbotten, large fields of sulphide ores were discovered in the twentieth century. Productive copper ores were exploited in Dalarna in north-central Sweden from the twelfth century, and for a long time Sweden was the largest producer of copper in the world. Today, those deposits are practically exhausted. This is also the case with the once important Norwegian copper ores of Røros in southern Trøndelag, mined from the mid-seventeenth century, and the silver ores of Kongsberg in Østlandet (the eastern part of southern Norway), exploited from the first half of the same century.

The landscapes of Iceland are marked, to a far higher degree than those of the other Scandinavian countries, by the effects of endogenous forces: volcanic and tectonic activity. The bedrock is mainly Tertiary basalt and occupies most of the island. The central and southern regions are characterised by lava fields and volcanoes that have been active in historical time. The majority of the glaciers were formed during the last glaciation when practically the whole country was covered by ice. Today four large glacier regions remain, of which Vatnajökull in the south-east is by far the largest. As for minerals, Iceland's basalt rocks and inland ice give little hope of future development. Historically, however, sulphur has been an element of some economic importance.

Føroyar, an archipelago consisting of eighteen larger islands and many islets and reefs, is situated on a submarine ridge between Iceland and Scotland and forms part of the North Atlantic basalt region. The islands are high and rugged. In many places mountains rise steeply from the sea, reaching heights of more than 700 and 800 m. But most of the islands also have flat summits at about 300 m, separated by narrow ravines and deep valleys. Passages between the islands run mostly from north-west to south-east. Vertical cliffs and strong

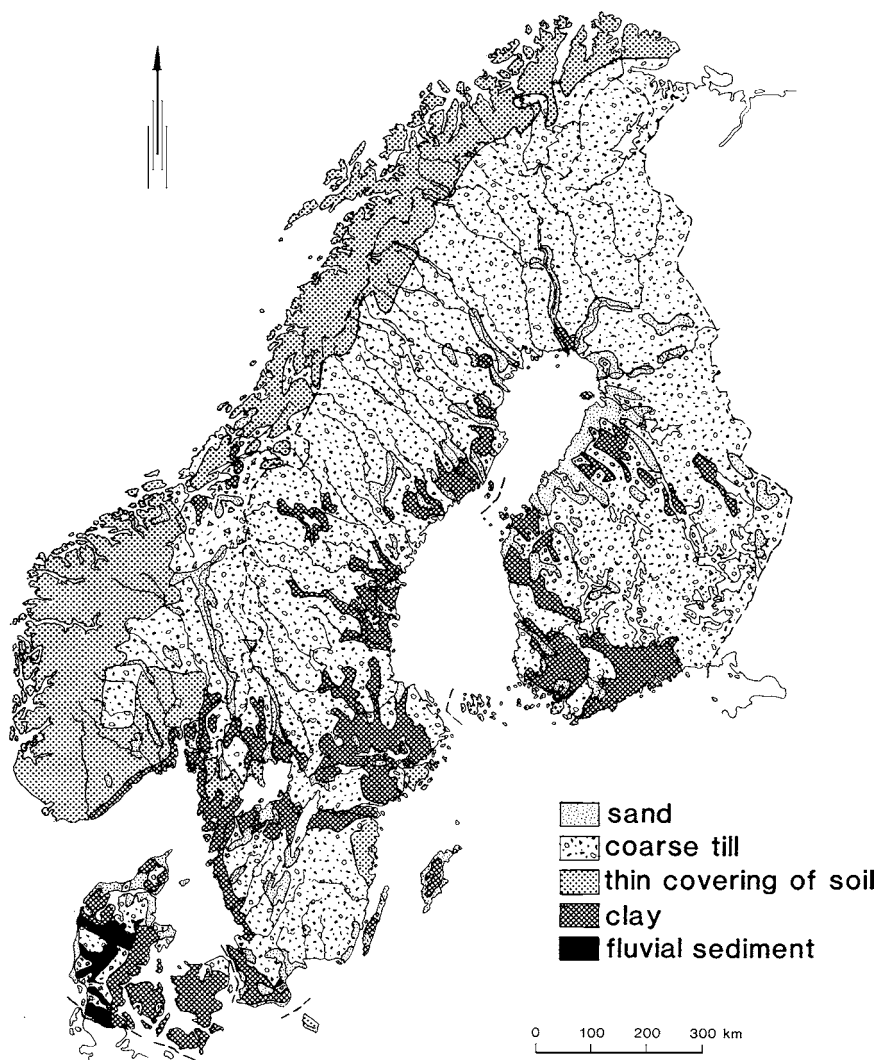
tidal currents do not favour landing except in the fjords and voes where most people have settled.

Conditions for cultivation

We have seen that the soils in Scandinavia consist mainly of relatively coarse glacial deposits, which have generally proved difficult to cultivate. Map 6 shows how the whole region is dominated by these glacial soils. The largest areas are covered either with sandy or coarse till. Eastern Norway, the highlands of southern Sweden, Norrland and Finland are completely dominated by coarse till covered with coniferous forests. But even in these areas there are exceptions. Above the highest shoreline the till has not been wave-washed and so the finer particles have not been removed. Here climatic conditions are also relatively favourable. In this huge region deposits of fine sediment can be found where there were once lakes at the edge of the ice, for instance in the southern parts of the South Swedish Highlands, round Lake Storsjön in Jämtland, and in many other parts of northern Sweden. In the present-day landscapes of eastern Norway and southern Sweden there is clear evidence of early cultivation in the form of extensive areas of clearance cairns – stones piled on the fringes of the land that had been cleared – around the former lakes at the edge of the ice.

Where the bedrock is more porous (limestone, chalk) the till has become clayey and very fertile. This is the finest and earliest cultivated land, to be found mainly in eastern Jylland, on the Danish islands further east, in south-western Skåne, on Öland and Gotland, in some places in Västergötland, and round Lake Storsjön in Jämtland. Here are also situated the oldest historically known village settlements in Scandinavia, much like continental and English villages. In fact, south-eastern Scandinavia (Fyn, Sjælland, Skåne) was part of the European open field culture, with nucleated settlements and an advanced system of cultivation.

In relatively low-lying terrain, below the highest shoreline, the soils developed under quite different conditions. After deglaciation the land was under water. Material transported by meltwater was deposited as sediments of generally fine particles in what were then bays and archipelagos. As the land rose and the shoreline was displaced out to sea it gradually became possible to cultivate the earlier marine sediments. They are to be found in the young landscape stretching from southern Norway eastwards through the central Swedish depression and across the Åland archipelago to southern and western Finland. The sedimentary clay is fertile but generally heavy and difficult to



Map 6 Quaternary deposits

work. The natural conditions of this terrain have been economically decisive in the creation of centres of political power.

One further type of soil suitable for cultivation and, consequently, for settlement is the fluvial sediment left by the numerous rivers and water-courses. In the river valleys sediments of sand and/or silt were deposited in front of the receding ice, just below the highest shoreline. During the subsequent shore displacement rivers deposited their sediments in the form of deltas at successively lower levels. The older delta deposits emerged early in post-glacial time. They consist of fluvial material, silt or fine sand, which retain water and are relatively difficult to cultivate. They were, however, decisive in the creation of the first rural landscapes in northern Scandinavia, especially those areas bordering the Baltic.

Finally, we must turn to the large regions of Scandinavia which have only a thin covering of soil or which, for other reasons, are not suitable for cultivation. In central and northern Sweden and in corresponding zones in Finland there is a very extensive lake and mire landscape that cannot be cultivated at all. Over vast areas in the north the soils are too thin to support agriculture, although they have been used a great deal for grazing by the Sami (Lapps) as well as by the Scandinavian-speaking population. Parts of western Sweden and along the east coast also belong to this category, as do Åland, the Åbo archipelago and large parts of the Norwegian mountain ranges right down to the Norwegian Sea. The landscapes of Iceland and Føroyar, too, are of this Scandinavian type. The layer of soil in Iceland can be quite thick in places, but the soils are too poor and climatic conditions too unfavourable to permit much cultivation. In Føroyar the soils have normally poor drainage and they are of little economic value – only some 5 per cent are under cultivation.

In summary, the natural resources that first attracted a permanent agricultural population are to be found mostly in Denmark, throughout the coastal regions of southern Sweden, in the central Swedish depression and around the Baltic. In Norway such resources occur most extensively in the low-lying areas of Østlandet, in Trøndelag further north, and in certain parts of Vestlandet (the western part of southern Norway). There are also some smaller agricultural areas, for instance round Lake Storsjön and in the river valleys in Sweden, in Finland, and in the interior parts of Østlandet.

Taken together, however, good conditions for cultivation and other factors favouring a relatively dense and permanently settled population are characteristic only of a small part of the Scandinavian landmass. Consequently, most of the land has to this day been left unpopulated by farmers or has only been used marginally.

The development of the Baltic Sea in relation to the Norwegian Sea

There are few regions in the world where the effects of the Quaternary glaciations and the subsequent successive changes of the coastline, have been so marked as in Scandinavia, particularly around the shores of the Baltic.

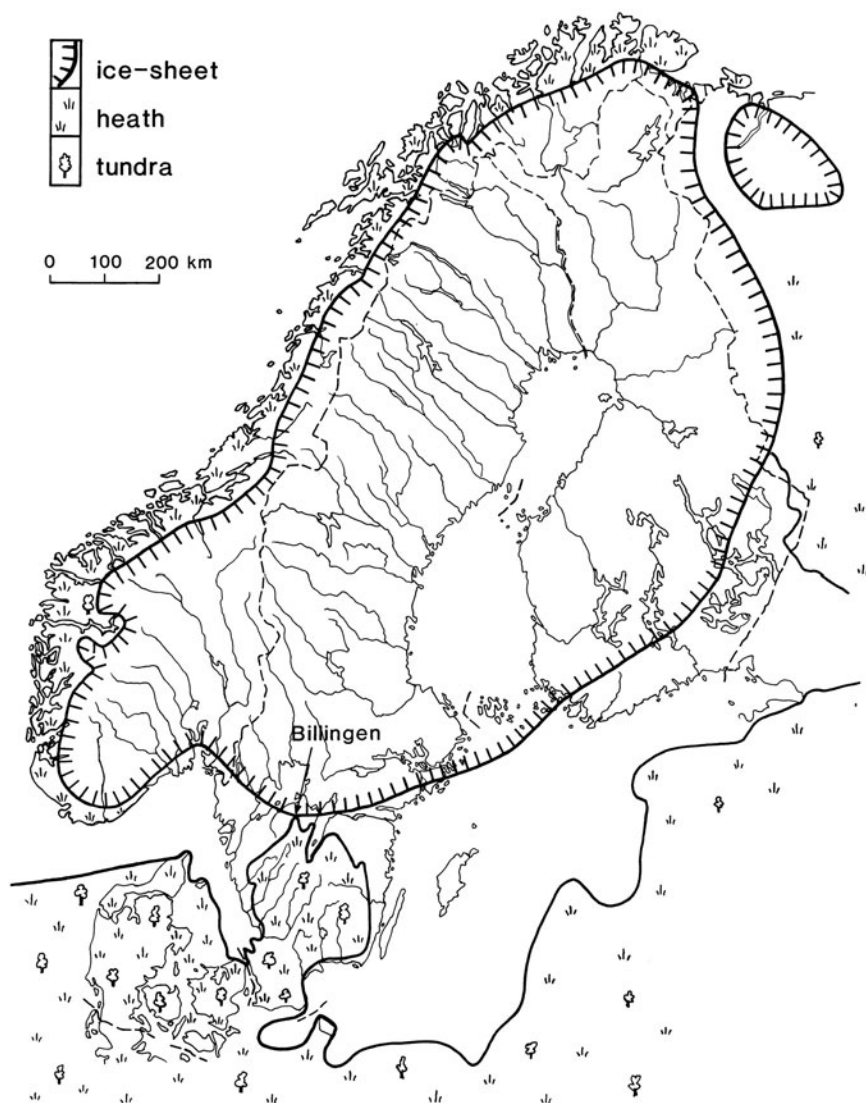
The effect of the land uplift in Scandinavia has already been discussed and its extent shown in Map 2. It is important to note that the isostatic rise is not equally distributed over the whole area. The centre of gravity of the inland ice lay over the Swedish east coast, in what is now the region of Ångermanland. Here the land has risen more than 800 m since the Weichselian glaciation reached its maximum extent about 20,000 years ago.

In addition to land uplift we must take eustatic changes into account, that is, changes in the level of the sea itself. Such movement is closely connected with climatic change and has been extensive. When the inland ice last began to recede, the sea level was more than 100 m below the present-day surface of the sea.

Taken together, these two phenomena have produced the shoreline changes that have already been noted in the initial description of the shaping of the Scandinavian landscape. Today, the shore displacement is greatest in the region of Norrbotten in northern Sweden where it is about 8 mm a year. It is smallest in the south of Sweden and in Denmark where we have seen that the land is even sinking.

When the last (Weichselian) inland ice began to recede, what is now the Baltic was joined to the Norwegian Sea where the Öresund region now lies between Sweden and Denmark. Rising land later blocked this passage and a glacial lake known as the Baltic Ice Lake was dammed up in the present Baltic Basin. This was about 13,000 years ago. About 10,700 years ago the Baltic Ice Lake was drained via the northern tip of the mountain plateau of Billingen in Västergötland (Map 7). The Baltic was then at the same level as the Norwegian Sea, thus introducing the next stage, the Yoldia Sea, named after *Yoldia arctica*, a mussel found in the Arctic Ocean. This open connection between the Baltic and the Norwegian Sea existed for about 700 years. In the south the land mass was joined to the Continent.

The next stage in the history of the Baltic was the Ancylus Lake, a freshwater lake (named after a mollusc *Ancylus fluviatilis*). During the preceding period the land uplift had been greater than the rise in sea level, and the lake found outlets via Lake Vänern and the Göta River valley (Map 8). The land uplift was greater in the north, resulting in a transgression (a rise in water level) in



Map 7 The Baltic Ice-Lake



Map 8 The Ancylus Lake

the southern part of the Baltic area where the water rose by 5–10 m a century. A large beach ridge, the Ancyclus Ridge, is a reminder of this event in many places in the south of Sweden. This transgression gave the Ancyclus Lake an outlet into what is now the Store Bælt (Great Belt). Once again the Baltic and the sea to the west were at the same level and a land bridge appeared across the central Swedish depression. This happened about 9,200 years ago.

Changes in climate caused the oceans of the world to continue rising. In the southern Scandinavia transgression took place more swiftly than land uplift. The Baltic started to become a sea of brackish water – the Littorina Sea, named after the mollusc *Littorina littorea*. In the following 2,000 years there was a series of transgressions, indicated by the Littorina beach ridge in southern Sweden. The various beach ridges that were shaped during different stages in the development of the Baltic have played a very significant part in determining settlement patterns, especially on Öland and Gotland. These gravelly, dry ridges attracted both roads and settlements, such as the long row villages on Öland.

In the last 5,000 years, shore displacement around the Baltic has mainly been caused by land uplift. New land has constantly been emerging, notably in the Mälär Basin, on the coast of Norrland, and in southern and western Finland.

The Norwegian Sea has not undergone such drastic changes. There are, however, some regions where the coastline has changed to a noticeable extent. These include the coasts of Bohuslän in western Sweden, the Oslofjord region, and the southernmost archipelago and fjord landscape of Norway.

The arrival of man and climatic changes

When the ice began to recede in southern and north-eastern Scandinavia a tundra-like landscape emerged which provided grazing for the flocks of animals that were hunted by man. Owing to the low sea level most of the North Sea was dry land (the 'North Sea Continent') and southern Sweden was joined to the Continent by a land bridge. It is assumed that colonisation mainly took place from the south. People must then have crossed the broad waters covering the central Swedish depression and the so-called *Norskerenna* (Norwegian Channel) along the coast of Norway. However, it is probable that they also came from regions in the north-east. Here the Varanger Peninsula was considerably larger than it is today, due to the much lower level of the Atlantic at that time. People may also have come from the north via Finland since it is possible that the eastern part of this region was not entirely covered by ice; in any case, the ice here receded quite early.

Presumably, then, the early colonisation of Scandinavia took place both by sea and land, partly via the Baltic, partly via the Norwegian Sea, and it first affected the coastal regions and the larger islands. The land bridge from the Continent was the main gateway. But the Scandinavian population appears to have come successively from other directions as well; it was not a mass invasion.

About 10,000 BC the climate improved for a thousand years, in the so-called Allerød Period. This was when birch migrated to Scandinavia. Ice receded from the whole of the west coast of Norway and early settlements sprang up. Settlements dating back to this time have also been found on Fyn, Sjælland and in Skåne.

The Allerød Period was, however, followed by climatic deterioration in the Younger Dryas (c. 9000–8300 BC). After that a warmer and drier period began with the Pre-Boreal Period (c. 8300–7000 BC). Scandinavia now had a climate that resembled that of the Continent. The water level in rivers and mires fell and it was probably in this period that forests began to spread more generally over what had once been tundra. Birch, pine and several herbaceous plants invaded the landscape as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

The climate improved further during the Boreal Period (c. 7000–6000 BC), becoming more humid but still comparatively warm in the Atlantic Period (c. 6000–3000 BC), when it reached its climatic optimum. Precipitation was now considerably greater than it is today and huge primeval forests came to dominate southern Scandinavia.

Traces of human habitation multiply in the very long warm period starting with the Pre-Boreal Period. It appears that people settled mainly along water-courses and on the shores of lakes. Fishing and hunting groups were to be found along the greater part of the Atlantic coast as far north as Nordkapp (the North Cape).

In the fourth millennium BC the long, warm era was reaching its height; it was followed by the drier Sub-Boreal Period (–c. 500 BC) with warm summers but cold winters. After that the Scandinavian climate came to resemble that of today with lower temperatures and increased precipitation. Culturally, the beginning of the Sub-Boreal Period was also the start of the Neolithic Age in Scandinavia when animal husbandry and cultivation was introduced. The last phase of the Sub-Boreal Period, which comprised the Bronze Age in Scandinavia, was replaced by the Sub-Atlantic Period (c. 500 BC), after which a maritime climate predominated. This type of climate is still characteristic across Scandinavia, except for certain parts of inner Sweden and large parts of

central Finland where the climate is more continental. During the latest part of the Sub-Atlantic Period, from about 1500 to 1900 AD, the climate again deteriorated. This Little Ice Age, as it has been called, was particularly noticeable during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

What will happen to the climate in the future is not clear. Some scientists are of the opinion that we are moving towards a warmer period, mainly because of the way man has interfered with nature, while others maintain that there has been no dramatic change in the Scandinavian climate during the last two thousand years. The latter refer to the glaciers of the Scandinavian mountain range as their main evidence. Admittedly the glaciers are constantly changing but according to glaciologists there are no signs of any drastic changes over the last two millennia.

Climate in present-day Scandinavia

Because of its great extent from north to south and the distance from the Atlantic in the west to the inland areas in the east, Scandinavia possesses a varied climate. The large variations in altitude are also significant: for every rise of 100 m, the temperature falls by 0.6°C .

In the western parts and the coastal areas to the north the climate is influenced by the prevailing westerly airstream from the North Atlantic. The wind drives the Atlantic Current (the Gulf Stream) and brings both warm air and warm water to the west and north-western coasts. Winter is comparatively mild and the summer cool, which is characteristic of a maritime or oceanic climate.

The opposite is true of the regions adjacent to the Eurasian continent in eastern Finland. There winter is very cold and the summer hot, the type of climate known as continental. Continental conditions are also to be found in the north of Sweden, mainly in Lappland. The low mountains behind Trondheim allow west winds to pass, which creates oceanic conditions in western and central Jämtland. Although they lie at an altitude of about 300 m and a latitude of 63°N the climate is favourable for cultivation, which makes the region round Lake Storsjön unique.

Scandinavia lies in the path of the westerly cyclones of the North Atlantic which pass across Denmark and southern Sweden without hindrance. Low-lying areas have relatively low precipitation but the moderately increased altitude of the western part of the South Swedish Highlands leads to much more extensive rainfall – up to 1,000 mm a year. The Swedish east coast and the islands of Öland and Gotland, on the other hand, have a drier climate. Stora

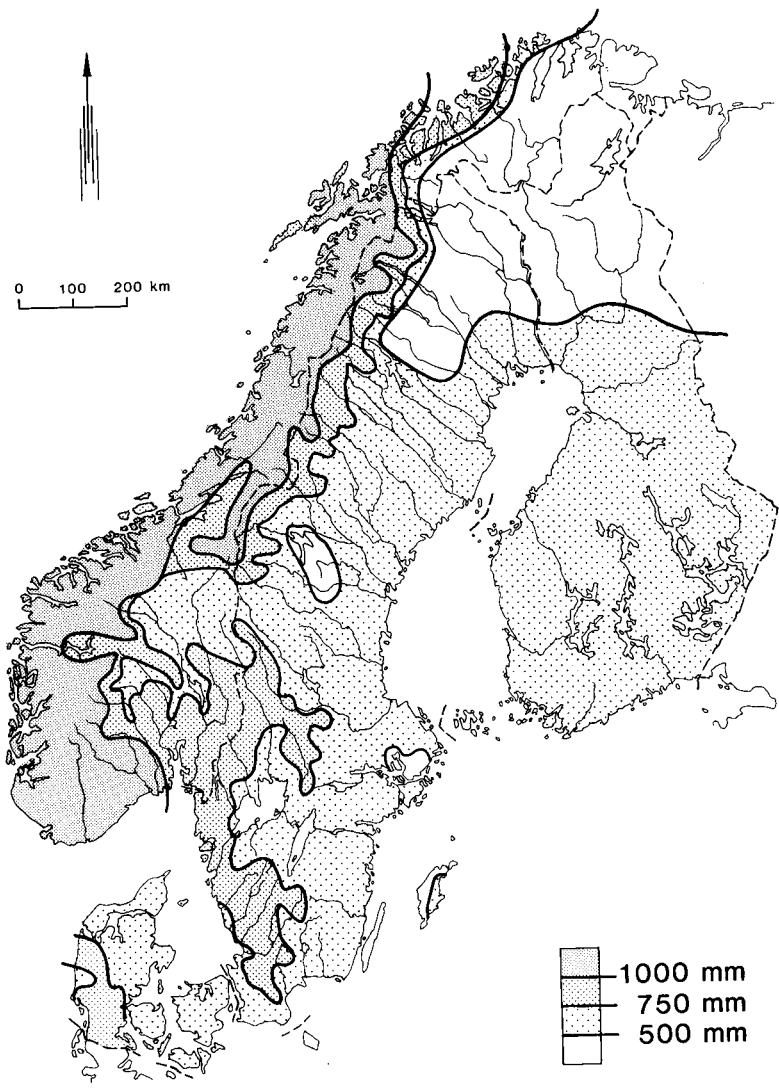
Alvaret in the south of Öland has almost a steppe-type climate with under 500 mm of precipitation a year.

The Scandinavian mountain range along the Atlantic coast stands as a barrier to the relatively warm, moist winds blowing in from the North Atlantic. The air is forced up and cooled, and the resultant precipitation is heavy in the western districts of Norway, and extremely so in the mountain regions behind the coast. By contrast, in the regions east of the mountain range there is normally a dissolution of clouds and precipitation is very low. Thus, there are areas in Lofoten and to the north of Narvik which have a precipitation of more than 2,500 mm a year while Torneträsk, a mere 100 km to the east, only has 400 mm. Similarly, low rates of precipitation are recorded in the inner parts of the fjord region of Vestlandet while areas further west in the same region, where the mountains rise sharply behind the coast, may have as much as 3,000–4,000 mm a year.

Except for the coastal areas, northern Norway, Sweden and Finland form a continuous dry region. Precipitation increases the further south one goes. The relationship between precipitation and temperature (evaporation, run-off) determines the humidity of the region and is important for the development of certain types of vegetation (for example, on boggy and waterlogged ground). Low temperature and high precipitation result in low evaporation rates and thus much higher surface humidity. Due to slightly varying physiogeographical conditions there are such areas of high humidity along the whole of the west coast of Norway, the west of Denmark, and the south of Sweden. Conversely, much drier conditions prevail in parts of south-eastern Sweden (Öland and Gotland), along the coast of the Baltic, and in south-west Finland. Locally, humidity can be very low in certain valleys east of the Caledonides (Map 9).

Iceland and Føroyar, situated as they are in the middle of the Atlantic, are a special case. Westerly cyclones bring warm and unstable air. The climate is oceanic with relatively mild winters and cool summers and the difference between the coldest and the warmest periods is rarely more than 15°C. In south-west Iceland precipitation is often more than 3,000 mm a year. In the lowlands to the north it can be lower and even very limited – as little as 400 mm a year.

The climatic influence on the distribution of vegetation is also governed by temperature and the length of the growing period. The latter is of the greatest importance to cultivation, as can be seen most clearly in northern Scandinavia where the number of sunshine hours is far above that further south. This



Map 9 Annual precipitation

has resulted in arable farming being possible in certain river valleys as well as cultivated meadow land far north of the Arctic Circle.

Coasts and inland seas today

The coastal landscapes of Scandinavia display a varied and often unique morphology. This arises from differences in geological structure, changes in sea level, and different patterns of erosion and accumulation.

Most spectacular perhaps is the long fjord coast of Norway with its protective archipelago and *strandflater*, low-lying areas above the continental shelf. Several fjords cut deeply into the country. The outer coast has naturally been the optimum location for fishing settlements, which have exploited the rich seasonal shoals of herring, cod and other gadoid fish which visit the coast in search of feeding or breeding grounds. Agriculture, notably animal husbandry, has been a complementary source of sustenance – to the extent that the people of the coast have commonly been described as fisher-farmers (Norw. *fiskerbønder*). The central and inner parts of the fjord landscape have a long tradition of mixed farming – arable in combination with cattle – and the same is true of coastal plains such as Jæren in the south-west of Vestlandet. The way in which the landscape is used here bears a strong historical resemblance to usage in other settlements further out in the Atlantic, such as those in Orkney, Shetland, Føroyar and Iceland, all of which were colonised from Norway in the Viking Age. In places along the coast of western and northern Norway steep cliffs jut forward without a protective archipelago and to the south there is similarly no archipelago to shelter the plains of Jæren and Lista. These exposed stretches of coast have long been a challenge to coastal navigation and remain so today.

In north-west Denmark and along the coast of Halland in western Sweden the coast is marked by sand dunes (Danish *klittekyst*). Here and there this dune landscape has developed in places that are today far inland. This coast can be difficult to cultivate since ocean currents are continually reshaping the coastline. The sparse grass vegetation to be found in these tracts is not sufficient for profitable animal husbandry either, but fishing is important.

Further south, the features of Denmark's west coast differ markedly from the rest of Scandinavia; they are more similar to those that characterise the continental coast to the south. In middle Jylland, where small dunes migrate inland or accumulate around seaweed, the coast is marked by tidal movement, the accumulation of material, and changes to the coastline. South

of that again begins the marshland with the tidal flats of the so-called *Vadehav* ('wadable sea'), a very shallow area of water about 10–50 km across.

Generally, the coasts of Denmark and Skåne have accumulations of glacial deposits which produce open, flat coasts without archipelagos. Ocean currents often chisel detailed topographical lines out of them. In western and particularly north-western Jylland, including the northern tip of the peninsula, navigation along the exposed coast has always been perilous.

Extensive and distinctive archipelagos are found in several places along the coast from southern Norway and the Oslofjord area, along the Swedish west coast, in Blekinge, and along the Baltic Sea coast in Sweden as well as in Finland. The Baltic archipelagos are products of the rather rapid uplift of a joint valley landscape with frequently exposed bedrock, and are thus really part of the fissure valley landscape of south-central Sweden and southern Finland. They have been inhabited by farming fishermen since at least the sixteenth century, and there is nothing quite like them anywhere else in the world.

Finally, in some places in southern Scandinavia there are rocky coasts, especially on Öland, Gotland, in a few small areas of Jylland, in western Sjælland and other Danish islands, and in south-west Skåne. Here the coasts are generally without an archipelago. In many places the abrasive action of the sea has created cliffs rising to a considerable height above sea level.

The Baltic Sea or, to give it its ancient name, *Eystrasalt* (the eastern sea) is the largest brackish sea in the world. Its total area, including the Danish Sounds (Store and Lille Bælt, Öresund), is 372,000 square kilometres. The sea can be divided into four areas: the Baltic Proper, the Åland Sea, the Gulf of Finland, and the Bothnian Sea together with the Gulf of Bothnia. Its deepest point is off the coast of Svealand in the northern part of the Baltic Proper.

Across this large expanse of water run two archipelagos, the southern and the northern Kvark (*Norra* and *Södra Kvarken*), which have been of great importance to coastal shipping and communications between various parts of eastern Scandinavia. The Åland archipelago and the further stretch of small islands towards Åbo in Finland (the southern Kvark) have been important bases for offshore fishing in the Baltic. In winter the Baltic is normally frozen as far south as the Åland Sea and the Gulf of Finland, sometimes even further south. The upper part of the Gulf of Bothnia may remain frozen for a very long time – from December to May.

The drainage area of the Baltic includes western Russia, Ukraine, White Russia and Poland. The sea is thus fed by a large flow of fresh water

which constantly dilutes the salt content. The salinity is about 1 per cent in Öresund but no more than 0.3 per cent in the northern part of the Gulf of Bothnia. The Baltic is consequently dependent on an inflow of salt water from the Norwegian Sea via the North Sea to maintain its biological balance. The quality of the water varies continually, which has important implications for fish stocks. The salinity impacts on the number of species, and time and again fisheries have seen periods of abundance and scarcity.

Man has naturally made use of the resources of the Baltic for a very long time, as kitchen middens confirm. Originally, fishing was on a small scale and non-specialised; coastal dwellers only fished for their own needs. Most of the catch was eaten fresh and any surplus was dried or smoked. The number of fish species has been more or less stable, although the composition has varied. In historic times written medieval and later sources show that salmon fishing played an important role in the Baltic and in the lower reaches of the rivers. The other main species were Baltic herring, cod, salmon trout and whitefish. Similarly, from the thirteenth century to the end of the Middle Ages, herring yields in the southern part of the Baltic and in Öresund were very high and of great commercial importance. Large quantities of salt were required to preserve the fish, with the result that the salt trade became crucial to the interests of Denmark and the Hanseatic League.

Vegetation zones and animal life

Vegetation depends on natural conditions, especially the climate, as well as geology and soil type. People have directly influenced the type and extent of vegetation in inhabited regions, creating characteristic cultural ecosystems such as meadows, enclosed fields and natural grazing land.

The greater part of Scandinavia was once covered by forest but over the past 3,000 years large parts of it have been transformed into farmland, mostly in regions where the soil is derived from fine sediment, particularly on bedrock that is rich in calcium. Consequently, farmland in Scandinavia is to be found mainly in Denmark, the south of Sweden, the central Swedish depression, along the shores of the Bothnian Sea and the Gulf of Finland, in south-eastern Norway, along the Norwegian west coast, and in the region of Trøndelag. Today, the proportion of land under cultivation varies from a few per cent up to 60–70 per cent (in Denmark). The area under cultivation reached its

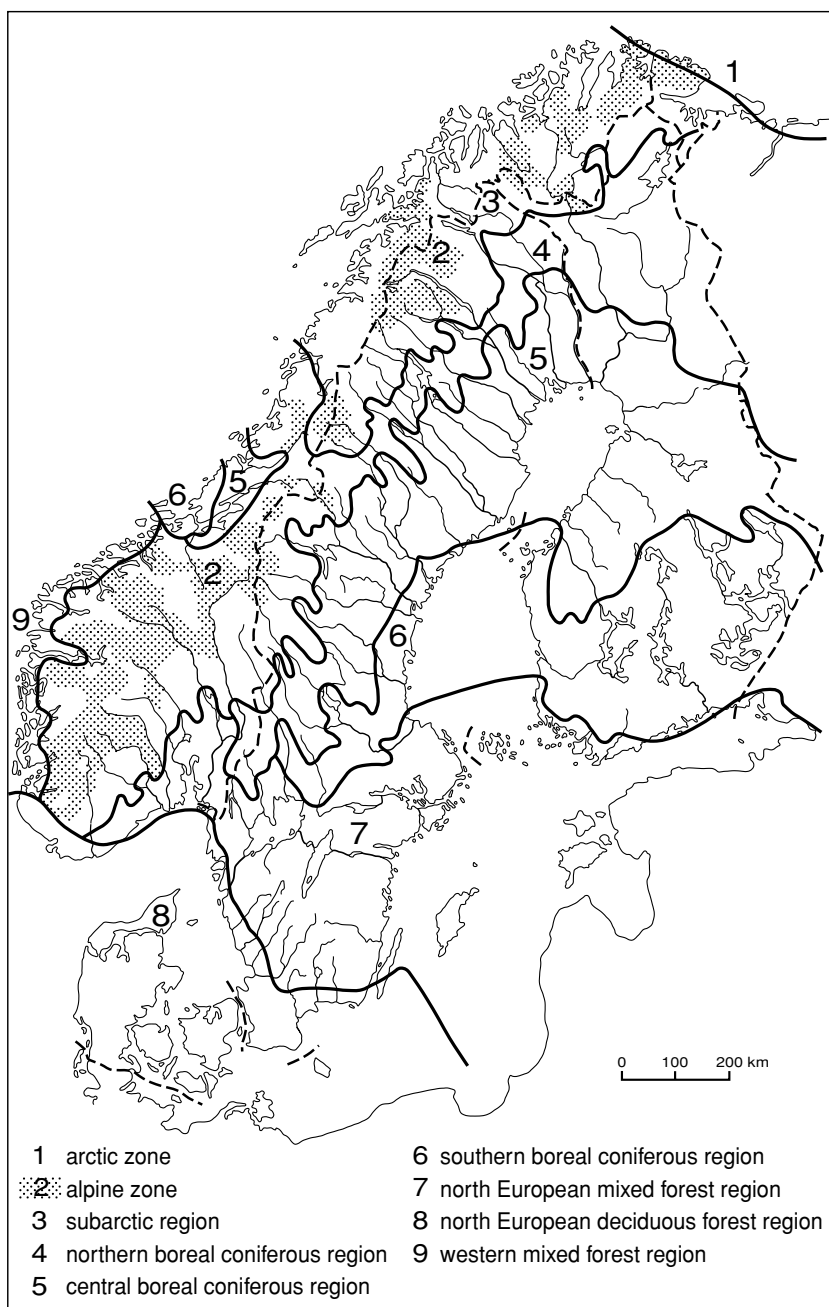
maximum at the beginning of the twentieth century, but in many places, notably in sparsely populated areas in Norway and northern Finland, new farmland has been cleared and the cultivated area remains actively exploited today.

The southernmost part of Scandinavia – Denmark, the southerly tip of Sweden, the Swedish west coast, and the very south of Norway – belongs to the middle European deciduous tree region (map 10), where firs do not grow naturally. Beech is one of the region's most typical trees but it is also rich in oak, elm and ash as well as herbaceous flora. The countryside bears the stamp of cultivation and there are many treeless landscapes, for instance the heaths of Jylland and western Götaland (of which only remnants remain). There is steppe-like vegetation in south-east Skåne and on southern Öland. In cultivated areas there are few wetlands, chiefly because of the drainage programmes undertaken in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The characteristic game of southernmost Scandinavia is roe deer and red deer and, on the west coast, fjord seal.

North of these areas is a large region of mixed forest extending from southern Norway in the west to southern Finland in the east. In Sweden the northern limit of this region coincides roughly with the southern limit of what is called Norrland terrain. These forests are dominated by fir and pine but deciduous trees also grow there naturally – mainly birch, but with oak, elm and maple as well. Firs demand relatively fertile soil while pines can make do with sandier and stonier land. Apart from birch, deciduous trees are mostly associated with cultivated areas where hazel has long been characteristic of meadows and groves. Birch, elm, lime and ash were used as fodder and for many other purposes in older subsistence agriculture. Consequently, such trees were an important element in infields.

There are some extensive wetlands in the region of mixed forest, particularly in the west. Öland and Gotland are quite different because of their dry climate and limestone bedrock. The flora there is very special, containing many species from more southerly areas, and has been affected by cultural activity over a long period. The mixed forest region as a whole was once rich in game deer and otter while today there is a considerable population of European elk (*Alces alces*).

North of the mixed forest region there is a sharp transition to the great northern coniferous belt – the taiga. The boundary is very clear and known as *limes norrlandicus*. Fir and pine are dominant – fir in the wetter and more fertile soils. Birch, which is the only common deciduous tree, is found throughout the



Map 10 Vegetation regions

whole coniferous region, and generally forms the highest and northernmost forest belt. In the south the tree-line runs at an altitude of about 1,000 m, in the north at about 500 m, and in the far north at sea level.

The coniferous region is comparatively poor in species and contains large areas of mires, particularly in the north. The area under cultivation is negligible and generally situated in the coastal areas and river valleys. There are, however, settlements of considerable age in other places as well, notably on the shores of lakes and in some high-lying areas where the inland ice deposited finer and cultivable sediment. At high altitudes and in the north the cultivated landscapes consist only of meadows and summer dairy-huts (Norw. *setrer*, sing. *seter*, Scottish shielings) with grazing land. The damming of rivers has increased the extent of wetlands and water meadows over quite large areas. To the east, in Finland, the proportion of birch increases, partly as the result of earlier clearances of parts of the forest by fire. The colonisation of this enormous forest region did not cease until the first part of the twentieth century in northern Sweden and after the Second World War in Finland.

The coniferous zone has long been the home of much sought-after game species such as bears, wolves, wolverines, otters and golden eagles. The forests are also the home of elk. However, in earlier times elk were also to be found as far south as Denmark and southern Sweden.

There are a few other vegetation zones in Scandinavia. The highest parts of the Scandinavian mountain range belong to an alpine zone. Historically, this zone has only been used for grazing reindeer which have been here in wild condition since the Boreal Period. In certain areas, including western Norway, there are many *setrer* and in some places there are permanent settlements on mountain farms. The mild climate of west-coast Norway permits a region of deciduous woods to flourish as far north as Trøndelag. The fauna, particularly the bird life, is of an Atlantic character. There are also seals and whales.

In Iceland there are really only two vegetation zones. On lower ground, under 600 m, there are trees, mainly birch and juniper. Man's depredations have reduced the arboreal vegetation so that the woods still existing in a few places consist almost only of birch (*Betula pubescens*). Above the tree-line is an alpine zone. Mires are common, both above and below the tree-line. Iceland is poor in native fauna, partly because of the country's isolated position in the Atlantic, just south of the Arctic Circle.

To a great extent the vegetation in Føroyar – shrubs, grassy heaths and bogs – is governed by natural conditions. The harsh, wet climate is favourable to grass while trees are stunted by strong westerly winds and frequent gales. But there

is also a cultural influence: large flocks of sheep contribute to keeping trees and bushes down. Animal husbandry and fishing in coastal waters have been the main means of subsistence throughout most of the history of the islands. In the voes flocks of pilot whales have traditionally been slaughtered. The cliffs on the west coast provide shelter for a rich bird life and fowling has been an important supplement to farming and fishing.

The Stone and Bronze Ages

ARI SIIRIÄINEN

The early hunters

The first inhabitants of Scandinavia migrated from the south, south-east and east following the retreating continental ice margin. In southern Scandinavia – i.e. present-day Denmark, southern Sweden and southern Norway – the late Palaeolithic hunters of the northern continental plains extended their hunting trips northwards in pursuit of the reindeer herds. On the Baltic plains, east of the Baltic Ice Lake, the vanguard settlement came from the south, from the eastern territories of the central European reindeer hunters. On the emerging southern Finnish coasts and in the Karelian zone these hunters met with people advancing from the south-east and east. In the north there was probably migration eastwards through the Arctic zone, although there is no clear archaeological evidence for this.

In Denmark and on the southern coasts of the Scandinavian peninsula the reindeer hunters belonged, archaeologically, to the so-called Hamburg, Ahrensburg and Federmesser cultures, which were already well established in the northern European lowlands. The most typical material manifestation of these cultures is the tanged point made of a long flint blade. Characteristic of the early Hamburg culture is also the so-called ‘Zinken’ artefact, a blade with a peculiar curved peak on one or both ends which was obviously used to produce points and harpoons from the long bones of reindeer. The northernmost finds of these tools derive from a complex of sites in the Finjasjö area in Skåne which demonstrate the northern limit of the Hamburg reindeer hunters’ trips about 14,000 years ago. During a warm spell in about 9000 BC (Allerød) within the generally still cold Late Glacial Period (Dryas) (see Chapter 1), elk were roaming the open forests of southern Scandinavia and were hunted, together with reindeer, by the people whose culture has been named after the finds at Bromme in Skåne; this was a northern extension of the Hamburg culture.

The environment of the early hunters was open tundra where huge reindeer herds migrated seasonally and provided an easy source of meat. The hunters took advantage of the predictable herding habits and migration routes of the reindeer, killing them with their effective arrows and using cleverly placed pit-trapping systems. Reindeer was the main source of food, and its hide provided material for shelters in the form of conical huts. Tools such as handles for hide scrapers (with scraper edges made of flint) and knives, hunting or fishing harpoons, and leister prongs were also made of reindeer bones and horns. Hides would also have been used for clothes and moccasins, although traces of these have so far not been found.

Along the Late Glacial coastlines of the North Sea the hunters, who had up to now adapted mainly to inland conditions, became acquainted with coastal areas and their environmental demands and possibilities. To exploit the marine resources fully they had to develop a means of moving along the coast and even on open sea – presumably skin canoes or kayaks. This made it possible to cross considerable stretches of water such as the Norwegian Channel between the North Sea Continent and the nearest coastline to the north – that is, if people did not cross it on ice.

Once people had adapted to coastal conditions they were able to move further north through the rugged coastal belt of western Norway, between the sea and the ice. Ultimately this led the hunters to the northernmost tip of the Scandinavian peninsula, in present-day Finnmark. Along this route they left traces for modern archaeologists to discover: the Hensbacka culture of western Sweden, Fosna of the southern and western Norwegian coast, and finally Komsa in the fjord landscape of Finnmark. The habitation sites and hunting stations of these people have yielded simple flint artefacts, including tanged points identical to the ones of the Ahrensburg culture. But flint objects become more scarce the further north one moves, due partly to the fact that flint was not to be found in the northern areas – where coarser tools of quartz or quartzite took its place – and partly to the growing importance of maritime resources such as seal and walrus rather than reindeer.

The development east of the Baltic was similar to that in the west: here too the early reindeer hunters moved northwards, following the retreating edge of the ice and leaving traces in the form of artefacts corresponding to the so-called Swidry culture of the Polish lowlands. Eventually they reached the eastern coastline of the Baltic Sea, now at the Ancylus Lake stage (Chapter 1). By about 7,500 BC they had arrived in present-day Estonia, as shown by the finds from the Pulli site near Pärnu. Fragments of a typical tanged point and other artefacts of late Swidry manufacture show that they had reached Lahti Ristola

in southern Finland by about 7250 BC. It should, however, be noted that there is no evidence of reindeer hunting as such in the early Mesolithic material of Estonia and Finland; the earliest known traces so far are from Enontekiö, Inari in Lapland, and are dated to c. 6000 BC.

In the north the flow of settlers from the south met with a wave of hunters coming from the south-east and east. The habitation sites of the latter are marked by characteristic quartz artefacts and other substitutes for flint such as slate. There are axes and chisels made with a crude but efficient striking technique, and also gouges, knives and spearheads, possibly even daggers. This material complex is known in Finnish archaeology as the Suomusjärvi culture. In the northern part of the Baltic area it is influenced by the late Swidry culture, the result being a mixed culture called Kunda.

In Estonia, where the soil is rich in chalk and preserves organic matter well, the Kunda sites often yield tools of bone, horn, wood and even bark; these include harpoons, leisters and shafts inserted with small points of flint or quartz. Some of these artefacts have also been found further north in Finnish peatbog sediments, which have also yielded an early Mesolithic sledge runner and what was probably a keel of a light boat. At one of the peatbog sites of the Suomusjärvi culture, Antrea Korpilahti in the Karelian Isthmus, fragments of a knotted net made of willow-bark fibre, many of its sinker stones, and floats of fir bark were found. This is one of the oldest net finds in the world so far; it has been dated by radiocarbon measurements to about 7,300 BC.

New and more varied means of subsistence

As the climate improved in the Pre-Boreal and Boreal Periods (c. 8300–6000 BC), and forests spread over the former tundra and the sea level rose, the inhabitants of southern Scandinavia changed their mode of existence. There seems to have been a general trend away from reliance on inland resources and a tendency to adapt instead to coastal conditions. This is reflected by the early Mesolithic Maglemose culture (c. 8000–6000 BC) whose habitation sites have been traced in bog layers in which organic matter has been preserved.

The stone inventory of the Maglemose culture includes new categories. Axes are common, as are also the so-called microliths, tiny fragments of blades retouched into geometric forms to be attached as edges to shafts of wood, bone or antler; this was a widespread technology in Europe at that time. Numerous bone points with serrated edges and real harpoons (which would have had barbs and rope attached), as well as the occasional leister prong and fish-hook, show that fishing was practised extensively, as do thick deposits of fish bone and

scales at some sites. But bones of wild animals, mostly elk, testify to hunting as well. The diet was presumably balanced by the gathering of plant food, particularly starch-rich roots. Archaeological evidence of this activity is hard to obtain but at some sites heaps of cracked hazelnut shells have been found.

The Maglemose sites are found in different topographical settings and some settlements were apparently occupied repeatedly at certain times of the year, which would seem to indicate a system of seasonal occupation of different ecozones. The inland populations, too, made use of marine resources, either directly or through contacts with coastal populations; this is evidenced by occasional remains of sea mammals at inland sites.

The extent and number of known sites increase throughout the Mesolithic period, probably due to a gradual growth of population. Excavated hut floors show the family to have been the basic social unit. Simple ornamentations on objects of wood and bone, including net motifs, bear testimony to artistic ambitions, as do also a few animal and human representations and amber pendants, some of them in animal forms. Some kind of ceremonial life is indicated by a couple of burials found at habitation sites and by the so far unique find of a possible cult house.

The increasing reliance on coastal resources – no doubt caused by the environmental changes mentioned above, particularly rising sea level – is reflected by the fact that later Mesolithic sites were commonly placed on the seashores where they often, especially in northern and north-eastern Denmark, appear as large ‘kitchen middens’ of seashells. The layers of these sites were often built up over a very long period extending from the end of the Maglemose culture in about 7000 BC to the onset of the Neolithic Funnel Beaker culture in about 3100 BC. This is the so-called Kongemose–Ertebølle continuum, named after Danish sites. The stability of settlement during this period was due to the rich and inexhaustible marine resources which provided food all year round. Some regional specialisation in the use of sea resources is apparent: in some coastal stretches seal was exploited while in others the emphasis was on oysters, fish or even seabirds.

The Ertebølle stone artefacts lack geometric microliths – only the trapezoidal oblique and transverse arrowheads persist. Axes are numerous, implying the spread of forest. Pottery now appears for the first time in Scandinavia, either as an indigenous invention or an import from the south. Pots were largish open vessels with slightly out-turned rims and pointed bottoms, their upper surfaces sparingly decorated by the use of fingernails. Flat dishes, reminiscent of those used by the Inuit until recent times, probably served as fat lamps. Such pottery has also been found in northern Germany and further west, and there

are resemblances between the Ertebølle pottery and that of the southern Baltic region in present-day Latvia and Lithuania. Thus, the early ceramic tradition seems to indicate a widespread network of cultural contacts.

Graves have been found at Ertebølle and related sites, and sometimes these occur in groups that can be called cemeteries; it should, however, be noted that they are part of the settlements themselves, not separate sites. Most of the graves are simple pits in which the deceased were placed on their backs in a straight position and covered with red ochre. They were buried with their clothing, personal ornaments, tools and weapons. The grave goods seem to reflect a mainly egalitarian society, albeit with some division of tasks. There are traces of killing and violence that may have been the result of considerable population pressure. The average height of the Mesolithic people was about 168 cm for men and 155 cm for women. Their mean life span, estimated from the skeletons excavated, was about 35 years but some individuals were aged between 50 and 60 years. Remains of a few huts, some of them with slightly sunken floors, have been discovered, but so far construction details are not known.

The Maglemose, Kongemose and Ertebølle cultures extended into southern Sweden and their influence was sometimes felt even further north. But in the Scandinavian peninsula settlement and cultural development continued to be mostly of the early Mesolithic type. Microliths occur in the Hensbacka, Fosna and Komsa milieus and axes seem to have become increasingly common. The tanged point slowly disappears, though it appears to have persisted longer in the south Norwegian highlands, where reindeer hunting remained important, than on the coast.

Even the southern coastal populations relied heavily on hunting on land, but in the north, in Finnmark, a dual economy based on the hunting of sea mammals on the coast and of reindeer and other animals in the interior plateau seems to have developed. In the south there are changes in the archaeological material that have caused new cultural entities to be defined: Limhamn in Sweden and Nöstvet in Norway, both of them characterised by heavy stone axes. In Komsa in the north, people started to produce gouges and axes of slate. Here the coastal communities lived, at least for parts of the year, in villages consisting of huts arranged in rows on flats by the sea.

In northern Sweden and in Finland north of the Gulf of Bothnia a peculiar and very persistent technology developed, utilising the special flaking character of the locally occurring amphibolite schist. Robust picks and axes of this material, sometimes up to 70 cm long, were probably used to hew holes in the thick winter ice for fishing and sealing, but it has also been suggested that they

may have served to hew holes in the frozen ground for hut foundations. Such 'Bothnian' implements were manufactured until the end of the Stone Age and possibly even later, during the Bronze Age.

In the eastern Baltic region the early Mesolithic inhabitants received new impulses, partly from the west and south-west, but mostly from the south-east. Influences from the Maglemose culture reached the southern part of this region, probably brought there by small migrant groups of settlers. In the Kunda culture further north, eastern influences were more strongly felt; evidence for this is in the form of arrowheads, ice picks and harpoons of antler and bone. The material culture of this area was closely related to the even more northerly Suomusjärvi culture of Finland and eastern Karelia, marked out by heavy axes and clubs of stone. A rich slate industry produced knives, daggers and points. Traces of Suomusjärvi influence have also been found on the Swedish side of the Gulf of Bothnia.

The introduction of agriculture and animal husbandry

Through continuous contact with Central Europe the southern Scandinavian hunter-gatherers learned how to cultivate cereals such as wheat and barley and to keep domestic animals. These modes of production, which had originated in the Near East as early as c. 10,000 BC, were first adopted by the Ertebölle communities in about 4000 BC; thus began the Neolithic period of Scandinavian prehistory. However, agriculture and animal husbandry did not become important means of subsistence alongside hunting, fishing and gathering until c. 3100 BC. Whether the innovations came as ideas or were brought by immigrants still remains unknown.

The shift to food production may have been caused by the rapid post-glacial changes in natural conditions, and was itself to have profound effects on the environment; this was the initial stage of the process leading to the recent cultural landscape of southern Scandinavia. Fire was used to clear forests for cultivation and grazing, which altered the composition of tree species and caused deforestation, at least locally. Such effects can be deduced from analysis of pollen deposited in bog layers and bottom sediments of lakes. The early Neolithic culture spread through Denmark into southern and central Sweden and south-eastern Norway.

It was not only the economy that changed in the Neolithic societies of southern Scandinavia; they also experienced changes in their social and cultural structures and in their technology. Cultivation and pastoralism required

more intensive cooperation, and led to the development of a form of social organisation based more clearly on division of labour. Production and storage of produce were dependent on planning, and more people were involved in tasks that were only indirectly connected with food production. Larger villages emerged and it seems that an increase in population, characteristic of farming communities in general, took place in southern Scandinavia.

The Neolithic economy demanded totally different types of tools and these were adopted from the south as part of the new modes of production. The vessels with pointed bases made by the Ertebölle potters were replaced by new ones with either round or flat bottoms, belonging to the so-called Funnel Beaker tradition which spread into Europe at this time. Stone axes became heavier now, and those with holes for shafting became more common; they were used to make clearances for cultivation in the forests. But the most carefully polished double-edged axes, made of beautiful stone, were probably meant mainly for ceremonial purposes. The Funnel Beaker culture can be sub-divided into phases according to the pottery and axe types. The sparsely decorated round-bottomed pots of the early Neolithic period were replaced, during the middle Neolithic period (c. 2600–1800 BC), by richly decorated beakers and amphorae.

The early Neolithic communities still buried their dead in simple shafts, sometimes timber-walled and covered by a longish barrow. Towards the end of the early Neolithic period a new burial custom spread from western and central Europe: the megalithic tombs. They may be regarded as the result of some sort of cult mission that swept over most of western Europe: from the Pyrenees through France, northern Germany and Poland, with offshoots into the British Isles and finally into Scandinavia. The early megaliths in Scandinavia were the so-called dolmens: a few large boulders placed in a circle with one on top, covered with earth so that only the top boulder was visible. The deceased and their grave goods were placed underneath the cover slab.

The middle Neolithic period saw the appearance of the so-called passage graves: elaborate constructions made of large boulders with one or two long passages underneath an earthen barrow, leading to a chamber where the remains of the deceased were placed together with vessels and other items to accompany them on the long journey to the 'other world'. The passage graves were collective burial places, used for longer periods, and are a characteristic element of the present-day cultural landscape in parts of southern Scandinavia.

While the early Neolithic villages were still rather small and situated on light soils where clearing by fire was possible, later settlements were larger and more

long-lived, often with large dwellings in the form of so-called long-houses, up to 30–45 m in length and supported by heavy posts. Several villages were fortified by ditches and palisades; this seems to be a reflection of competition over resources caused by a steady growth of population.

Continuation of hunting and fishing economies

To the north of the Funnel Beaker territory people continued to base their economies on hunting and fishing, although there was a contact zone showing signs of borrowing from Neolithic production. On the coasts of southern Sweden and the Danish islands, in the southernmost part of Norway and in central Sweden population groups went on exploiting marine resources as they had done before. Seal hunting was the main means of subsistence in these communities and they had learned to produce pottery for processing seal fat. Their large and open pots had pointed bottoms and were decorated with pits and different kinds of impressions and stamps. The habitation sites of this Pitted Ware culture, as it is called, were always located very close to the shoreline where marine resources were exploited, but fragments of bones of domestic animals, mainly pigs, have also been found at some sites. The Pitted Ware people appear to have migrated to Åland and vague traces of their culture have been found on the south-western Finnish coast.

The pottery and some other elements of the Pitted Ware culture, for example animal art representations sculptured on axe hammers or in the form of clay figurines, offer points of resemblance with the Comb Ceramic culture that spread over large parts of the Boreal forests of eastern Europe after c. 4200 BC. In Finland it appears that the Combed Ware was adopted from the south-west and used for the processing, storing and trading of fish and seal fat. The vessels are very large, with volumes of 40 litres – and occasionally even 70 litres. Their mouths are open and their bottoms pointed or rounded, and their outer surfaces are covered with stamps and pits.

From c. 3400 BC a new and forceful flow of impulses – possibly also reflecting extensive immigration – made itself felt in Karelia, Finland, and, to a lesser extent, in the areas east of the Baltic. The pottery was now decorated with comb stamps and pits, always arranged carefully in horizontal rows or forming rhomboid fields; a rarer motif used schematic representations of swans executed with comb stamps. Pottery of this type has given rise to the designation Typical Comb Ceramic culture, finds from which have many elements in common. Amber from the south-eastern Baltic was distributed in the form of pendants and lumps of raw material, obviously regarded as prestigious items,

and east European flint was traded both as raw material and finished arrow and javelin heads. This was an exchange that was probably dependent on a degree of social and ideological unity throughout the Typical Comb Ceramic sphere, and it is possible that the Scandinavian Pitted Ware complex, at least partly, shared this common basis. Trading journeys were made by dogsledges, many of which have been found in peatbogs in Finland and Sweden.

A fairly rich variety of stone tools typify the Comb Ceramic culture. Some of them, such as T-formed slate knives, have been found also on the western side of the Gulf of Bothnia. But there were eastern connections as well, involving an influx of both raw materials and artefacts. In addition to flint, certain kinds of wood, notably Siberian *sembra* pine, were imported for spoons and other items, and a few copper objects found in eastern Finland – an axe and a bracelet – have been dated to this period.

The communities of the Typical Comb Ceramic culture lived by hunting, fishing and gathering, as did the people of the Pitted Ware culture. On the Baltic coasts sealing was important, at least during spring, and extremely productive; it seems that many of the coastal settlements were almost sedentary, although no signs of cultivation or pastoralism have so far been found. The abundance of amber and flint at the coastal sites seems to indicate prosperity.

The people of the Comb Ceramic and Pitted Ware cultures buried their dead in simple pit shafts, and the use of red ochre was common; most of the finds of amber and flint objects derive from these graves. Some cemeteries have been located, notably in Gotland and along the south-western coast of Finland. In Finland there are also graves with stone slab cisterns, but these are an isolated phenomenon and do not belong to the megalithic burial tradition of Scandinavia.

Until the early 1980s it was regarded as probable that the arrival of Finnic-speaking people in Finland was associated with the Typical Comb Ceramic stage; they were believed to have descended from the Mesolithic Uralic-speaking population further east. However, such a linking of archaeologically defined cultural entities with linguistic ones cannot be proved and it has recently been suggested that the increase of settlement finds in the period in question is more likely to have been associated with some kind of economic boom, in turn prompted by the warming of climate. If Typical Comb Ware does not indicate the arrival of Finnic speakers they may have been there even earlier, since it is difficult to suggest a suitable later time of arrival. Some researchers have even argued that a Uralic form of language may have been spoken in Finland and the east Baltic region since the end of the last glaciation.

In eastern Finland, where natural occurrences of asbestos mineral were easily extracted using primitive mining technology, a special ceramic tradition emerged during the early Comb Ceramic period in which asbestos was used to temper the ceramic clay. This tradition was to continue through various cultural periods into the Iron Age. The middle Neolithic form of the asbestos pottery tradition, Kierikki, which developed during the Typical Comb Ceramic period, constituted the northern periphery of the Comb Ceramic exchange sphere discussed above.

On horizontal and vertical rock surfaces in Norway, northern Sweden, eastern Finland and Karelia are found rock carvings and paintings that have been dated to the period from the end of the Mesolithic period to the early Bronze Age. With their naturalistic animal representations (mostly elk and bear, but also fish and fowl) and a few schematic human figures, they reflect the hunters' ritual life. The symbolic hunting scenes indicate the belief that magic could procure a successful kill, and the scenes were possibly also expressions of a shamanistic spiritual world. Where the hunters came into contact with the southern agriculturalists their art occurs together with the art of the cultivators, indicating common rituals at sites where products were exchanged between these groups.

North of the Funnel Beaker and Pitted Ware/Comb Ceramic cultures, stone technology, dominated by slate, developed further. Southern Scandinavian influences, possibly also immigrants, penetrated northwards along the Norwegian coast to Finnmark. From the east the coastal population of Finnmark was also influenced by the northern early Comb Ceramic culture called Säräisniemi 1; otherwise the slate complex lacked pottery. This northern slate culture had its roots in the various Mesolithic cultures discussed above and it may mark the beginning of the development of the ethnic identity of the Sami.

New immigrants from the south

About 2300 BC a marked, not to say dramatic, cultural change occurred in southern Scandinavia: a new technology and new ideas took root. How this came to happen is a matter of some dispute but there are strong indications that the changes were caused by immigrants from the south. The result was a culture which has been named after its pottery, Corded Ware, but it is also called Single Grave culture in Danish archaeology and Boat or Battle Axe culture in Norway and Sweden – these are all designations that single out

characteristic features of the cultural complex that now came to overshadow completely the old Funnel Beaker culture.

The Corded Ware people migrated from central Europe. They spread over the whole of Denmark, making themselves felt not least in Jylland, and penetrated into southernmost Norway and Sweden as far north as Uppland. Another flow of settlers followed an eastern route through the eastern Baltic and may even have reached south-western Finland a couple of centuries earlier than the arrival of the western immigrants.

In Scandinavia the Danish finds differ somewhat from the Swedish and Norwegian ones, and the Baltic connections brought yet other special elements to Finland. Such regional differences suggest ethnic diversity as well; we seem to be dealing with a cultural complex rather than a coherent culture. This complex has been thought to reflect the spread of population groups speaking Indo-European languages. But it is equally possible that even earlier south Scandinavian Neolithic populations belonged to this language family. Since the populations belonging to the earlier Typical Comb Ceramic culture in the Baltic region and Finland were probably Finnic-speaking, the newcomers would at least have a different ethnic identity.

The most characteristic objects of the Corded Ware complex are the battle axes with shaft holes. They are consistently made with great care, using selected rocks. In their detail they imitate the copper axes that were being produced at this time in the central and south-eastern parts of Europe. The name of the pottery, Corded Ware, derives from the cord impressions that often adorn the neck of the beakers, but other decorative elements are also found. There are various forms of vessels: longish beakers with a slightly narrowed neck, open bowls, cylindric pots and globular amphorae. The diversity of forms is pronounced in Denmark but seems to be more restricted in Finland.

The graves of the Corded Ware people are completely different from those of the earlier cultures. We have seen that the megalithic passage graves of southern Scandinavia were collective burial places; now, however, the dead were buried individually in pits that were often, but not always, covered by a barrow. Sometimes the same barrows would be used for new burials on top of the original ones, and thus several chronologically distinct burials can be found in one and the same barrow. Occasionally the Corded Ware people even used old dolmens and passage grave mounds for their burials. The deceased were sometimes placed in wooden coffins and in some of the graves there are traces of ceremonial fires; around many graves in Denmark there are also circular ditches. The body could be put in a straight position but was more

commonly placed in a sleeping position on one side with the feet slightly bent.

The Corded Ware people were pastoralists who additionally cultivated wheat and barley. The northern limit of their territory was apparently determined by their economy, which did not, however, prevent the spread of their culture along the Atlantic and Baltic coasts in Norway and Sweden. In Finland, where earlier remains of Neolithic economies have so far not been found, the concentration of Corded Ware sites in the south-western part of the country, where climate and soils are best suited to cultivation and pastoralism, supports the conclusion that these modes of production were now practised here as well, even if there is as yet no direct evidence for them. Even if there are traces of the Corded Ware culture as far north as Rovaniemi in northern Finland it does not appear that the Corded Ware people advanced further than south-western Finland. North of this area there was a strong village-type culture subsisting on hunting, fishing and gathering which may have prevented them from moving further northwards.

When the Corded Ware people invaded Finland regional differences within the Typical Comb Ceramic culture were increasing and it appears that the culture was in the process of losing its unity. Amber and east European flint imports faded out and eventually ceased completely in southern Finland and the culture generally acquired a provincial character. The organised ornamentation of the pottery disintegrated into loose and carelessly executed rows and fields of small pits and fingernail impressions. But the slate industry kept its importance and produced different types of arrowheads and knives. Clearly, hunting on land and in the sea still formed the basis of subsistence over most of Finland.

In south-western Finland it appears that a reduced but persistent Comb Ceramic population continued to live alongside the Corded Ware people. Further east and north the asbestos ware flourished. The Kierikki pottery, originally derived from the Typical Comb Ceramics, disappeared and a new type, the Pöljä pottery, came to dominate. The boundary between the Corded Ware and Pöljä cultures is quite sharp, and implies a difference in ethnic composition as well as in economy. It has been argued that the penetration of the Corded Ware culture brought Baltic loanwords into the Finnic languages and that henceforward there occurred a differentiation process between the early Finnish language in the south-western and southern coastal districts and the early Sami language in the north-east and east.

The asbestos ware had not yet spread to the northernmost part of Scandinavia where aceramic cultures still prevailed. Here slate artefacts, not much

different from those of the earlier periods, were still produced. Some influences from the south can, however, be seen in the arrowheads which closely resemble the long and slender arrowheads of slate from southern Finland.

Towards the end of the Stone Age

Cultivation and pastoralism had been introduced at the culmination of the most favourable climatic period known in Scandinavia since the Quaternary glaciations (see Chapter 1). During much of the Neolithic period summers were long and warm, winters short and mild, but towards the end of the Stone Age the climate started to deteriorate. Even so the Scandinavian cultivators and pastoralists continued to expand northwards into areas that had previously been sparsely populated. They were probably pushed by increasing population pressure in the south, which called for a more intensive system of food production involving new technologies and resources.

From the early Neolithic period, continuous and lively contacts with the European communities further south had brought isolated copper artefacts to the north, mostly ornaments but also flat axe and dagger blades and a few shaft-hole axes of south-east European types. A steady flow of copper and, subsequently, bronze objects started c. 2300 BC, this time from central and western Europe. Copper and tin, the two components of bronze, were not easily accessible in Scandinavia with the primitive technology then at hand, and consequently all metal was imported. This added prestige to the practical value of bronze as a raw material for weapons and tools, which in turn affected economic and social structures: an ever greater portion of the primary production was exchanged for copper and bronze. It appears that communities became stratified with a small élite at the top, headed by a chief who controlled the exchange networks and demonstrated his status by having at his disposal handsome copper and bronze objects. Most people were involved in agriculture and cattle herding, fishing and hunting, and the commodities against which metal was traded probably included furs, seal fat, seal skins and amber.

In parallel with the first use of metal, a high-quality flint technology developed in southern Scandinavia. Flint was very skilfully worked and retouched in imitation of metal objects; not only were arrowheads and axes produced but even daggers and swords. The same technology was used to manufacture extremely effective sickles for reaping the harvests from the fields and grass from natural meadows.

The cultural – and ethnic – continuity from the preceding period is clearly demonstrated by the burials: so-called stone cist graves dug into the ground, more rarely with wooden cists. Usually the graves have no superstructure above the ground but sometimes there is a heap of stones or an earthen barrow on top. These graves were earlier seen as belonging to the megalithic tradition but are now considered to be a direct continuation of the burials of the Corded Ware culture.

Houses were constructed more durably as rectangular longhouses up to 18 m in length, with wattle and daub walls, and supported by poles. There were buildings for different purposes, forming villages of ten to twenty houses. A remarkable innovation was the wheel cart drawn by oxen – the first finds from Denmark go as far back as c. 2500 BC.

Roughly parallel developments can be seen east of the Baltic Sea and even in south-western Finland. Along the south-eastern Baltic coastline the so-called Haffküsten culture was a continuation of the local Corded Ware culture. In Finland the Kiukainen culture of this period can be seen as a mixture of Corded Ware and late Comb Ceramic cultures. Here the deteriorating climate caused a crisis for the Corded Ware economy whereas the original Comb Ceramic population with its hunting and fishing economy adapted better to the changing conditions. Consequently the Kiukainen culture inherited more from the Comb Ceramic than from the Corded Ware tradition, although certain features, for example the pottery, derive from the latter.

In the north the slate culture prevailed. Beside the Bothnian axes and picks its selection of artefacts now included elegantly flaked and polished barbed arrow and javelin heads, daggers and knives, often with an elk or bear head sculpted in the handle. On the Finnish side the Pöljä tradition continued, but otherwise the northern sphere was still without pottery. On the coast of Finnmark the marine hunters continued to live in villages that were now even larger than before. Their tools were made from local rock as well as from bone and antler.

In Swedish Norrland systematic archaeological investigations have revealed, as surface occurrences, a considerable number of habitation sites that seem to derive from this period. Here quartz was extensively used as a raw material for artefacts that were made of flint in more southerly districts. Slate was used in the same manner as in the more northerly area and pottery was also lacking here.

To sum up, in Norrland, northern Finland and Finnmark there was clearly a cultural, ethnic and technological continuity from the early Stone Age. It appears that the whole late Neolithic complex in northern Scandinavia developed

uninterruptedly from the respective regional traditions of the earlier periods but with a denser settlement and a more intensive utilisation of resources. There was, as we have seen, an expansion of southern agriculturalists towards the north but this did not markedly affect the local traditions.

The Bronze Age of Scandinavia

Around 1800 BC the flow of bronze objects into southern Scandinavia reached such proportions that the term Bronze Age becomes adequate, not least because the imported objects were now also used as models for smelting and casting of bronze in local workshops. No dramatic changes seem to have occurred in culture, society, economy or demographic conditions, but archaeological finds from this period – burials, habitation sites, hoards, etc. – become more plentiful and complex. There was a lively exchange of goods with central and, especially, western Europe by which metal was obtained in return for furs, seal skins and amber.

The basic means of subsistence in southern Scandinavia was still agriculture and animal husbandry but on the coasts fishing and seal hunting often exceeded these in importance. Land was even more intensively exploited for cultivation and pastures than before and considerable deforestation occurred in some areas; this can be deduced from analyses of pollen samples in which tree pollen diminishes dramatically and gives way to grassland and heath species.

Metal artefacts, particularly objects of gold which now appear for the first time, are unevenly distributed in the graves; they seem to have belonged primarily to important individuals in a stratified society led by chiefs.

Burial customs had much in common with those of the late Neolithic period. The dead were placed in pits, sometimes in stone cists or, as in Denmark, in hollowed-out oak trunks, and a high barrow of earth or a cairn of stones was piled on top. In southern Scandinavia thousands of such monumental graves have been found, often in clusters of many barrows. However, only the highest-placed individuals merited such burials; most of them were men but quite a few wealthy women were also buried beneath barrows. Ordinary people had to make do with more modest graves. In later periods of the Bronze Age the barrows became smaller, and by the end cremation burials under flat surfaces came to dominate, forming large cemeteries.

The clustered geographical distribution of the Bronze Age barrows has been interpreted as showing territorial divisions: each chiefdom marked its territory with its own barrows. Competition over resources is reflected in the multitude of weapons found in the graves.

Artefacts follow European fashions in form as well as in ornamentation. Swords developed from daggers, and axes with simple, flat edges developed through flanged ones to socketed types. Richly ornamented shaft hole axes were obviously meant for ceremonial use only. A warrior's equipment also included javelin heads and, during the later Bronze Age, a shield and leg armour.

Ornaments include finger rings, bracelets, necklaces and the so-called belt-plates. Cult objects of different kinds have been found, particularly as offerings in bogs and lakes. These include long and curved trumpets, a model of a cult wagon with a cast horse drawing a gilded disc as a symbol of the sun, and several metal vessels. The many hoards consisting of weapons and ornaments that have been found all over southern Scandinavia are indications of troubled times and competition between the societies. The European-style ornamentation carved onto weapons and adornments included spirals, geometric patterns and concentric circles. With the help of ornamentation and artefact categories, and finds such as graves and hoards, a very precise and reliable archaeological chronology has been established for the Scandinavian Bronze Age culture.

In the oak coffin graves mentioned above the bark acids have helped to preserve organic matter such as clothing. Men were buried wearing a loincloth and a long mantle, and women a shirt and a skirt.

In southern Scandinavia, as far north as Trøndelag in Norway and Uppland in Sweden, rock-carvings were a characteristic part of Bronze Age culture; they were often painted with red ochre and frequently found on flat or sloping stone surfaces (polished by ice) in cultivated areas. They contain a variety of motifs: human representations and scenes that are mostly connected with cultivation or seafaring in which rituals are being performed. Different kinds of symbolic figures occur, such as circles (sun figures?), soles of feet, palms of hands and small offering pits. This is an art that obviously reflects the ritual life of agriculturalists; securing a good harvest was a constant concern and the sun was the central element.

There was an economic upswing in southern Scandinavia in the Bronze Age. But in order to secure the importation of metals from the south the Scandinavians had to exploit territories further north. About 1500 BC they were roaming the south-western Finnish coastline, obviously with the purpose of exploiting the seal and other marine resources there. They first established trading posts among the Finnish coastal Kiukainen settlements. Here their activity became permanent and a process of colonisation began, although not on a large scale. The local population adopted the new technologies and cultural behaviour of the Scandinavians; thus the new influences spread rapidly

in coastal areas and in some cases even reached the inland communities. Eventually the whole of coastal Finland, from the head of the Gulf of Finland to the head of the Gulf of Bothnia, was affected. This can be deduced from the thousands of stone cairn burials located on high ground and from stray finds and offerings of bronze objects, including some hoards, along the coastal strip and further inland. Through these contacts agriculture was introduced into Finland from the west, and with it came, presumably, an early layer of Germanic loanwords in Finnish.

In eastern Finland only faint ripples of these western contacts were felt, even if some bronze found its way there, and local casting of socketed axes developed. At the same time a wave of influences from the south-east, ultimately from central Russia, brought a new type of ceramics to south-eastern and eastern Finland: textile pottery. The first traces of cultivation, indicated by wheat and barley pollen in some peatbog layers, have also been dated to this period and assigned to the same wave of influences.

Agriculture, then, seems to have been introduced into Finland from the west and the east at roughly the same time. However, hunting, fishing and gathering remained the basic means of subsistence, at least in the east, and in the north they were still the only sources of livelihood.

The encounter between the textile and asbestos pottery traditions in eastern Finland led to a new type of ceramics: the Säräisniemi 2 tradition which can be divided into regional sub-groups. The northern group extended to northern Norway and Sweden and spread southwards until it came into contact with the early metal-using settlements there. The Säräisniemi 2 sphere is more or less identical with the Sami sphere of the early historical era.

Towards the end of the Bronze Age another eastern wave of influences arrived in the form of imitated textile pottery, but these apparently had a minimal impact on existing technologies and ethnicity. From the south new cultural ideas and perhaps even ideologies reached Scandinavia. Cremation burials became increasingly popular and no new barrows were erected, though secondary burials were sometimes placed in the old ones. We are now approaching the early Iron Age both in the northern regions, where most artefacts were still made of stone and bone, and in the south. The introduction of a new technology, in the form of smelting of iron from bog and lake bottom ores, will be explored in the following chapter.

The Iron Age

BJØRN MYHRE

General perspectives

The geographical location of Scandinavia is an important reason why the region has always had cultural contacts in two directions – across Finland and the Baltic to the eastern part of the European continent and across Denmark and the North Sea to central and western parts of Europe. Climatic and geological factors go a long way towards explaining why arable farming gradually came to be the principal economy in southern Scandinavia and in coastal districts of Norway, Sweden and southern Finland, whereas hunting, fishing and pastoral farming were more important in the northern regions and the interior.

In the Bronze and Iron Ages Scandinavia therefore became a meeting place for two contrasting cultural traditions, the north-east European hunting societies in the north and the continental agrarian societies in the south (see Chapter 2). The boundary between these was not permanently fixed, but generally it can be drawn from Viborg in the east through Vaasa and Umeå to southern Troms in the west. The agrarian societies showed a general tendency to expand northwards during the Iron Age, particularly along the coasts of northern Norway, northern Sweden and Finland. On the other hand, the people inhabiting the interior uplands and forests of Norway and Sweden as far south as Trøndelag and Jämtland were strongly influenced by those in the northern area.

As the Iron Age progressed, Scandinavia changed from being a separate region in Europe to becoming a border area, initially to the Roman Empire and then to the Merovingian and Carolingian kingdoms. The history of Scandinavia in the Iron Age is an example of changes of cultural and political relations on the borders of an empire, from egalitarian tribal societies to chiefdoms and petty kingdoms. This development was a consequence of influence and pressure exerted from the major centres of continental Europe

and of the positive action of local political players and entrepreneurs operating in relation both to more distant centres and to their neighbouring societies.

Economic and political developments form the basis for the ethnic and linguistic differences that appear in historic times. As time passed, the dominating culture and language of the warlike Germanic petty kingdoms of southern Scandinavia became increasingly supreme in the northern Scandinavian territories, sometimes oppressing the Sami and sometimes cooperating with them.

The geological and ecological conditions in Scandinavia meant that a wide range of natural resources were available for the local population within short distances. In the early part of the Iron Age comprehensive utilisation of resources and a high level of self-sufficiency were usual, but economic specialisation gradually gained ground and a more intensive exchange of goods developed between central and peripheral areas. This also paved the way for a denser population outside the richest agricultural areas. Many Scandinavian resources were important for the major kingdoms of Europe and political leaders in the Scandinavian centres knew how to take advantage of long-distance trade with such commodities. To understand the political development in Scandinavia during the Iron Age we must therefore take into consideration the resources of the north which were in demand in Europe.

Tribal societies, 500–1 BC

The earliest iron

Iron and iron technology were instrumental in laying a new basis for the development of tools, crafts and the economy, but the new metal was also of strategic value as an object of barter and for manufacturing weapons. New research into the oldest history of iron in Scandinavia has led to surprising results as regards both the dating of the earliest iron production and the course of the innovation process.

There is evidence, from about 800–700 BC, for advanced bronze casting at many settlements around Lake Mälaren and in western Sweden. Small quantities of iron were also obtained when iron-bearing copper was smelted in order to manufacture bronze before iron-bearing bog ore was used. The iron was forged into tools and jewellery of the same shapes and types as those which were cast in bronze. Iron, then, had functional significance from the start and its quality was actually better than mass-produced iron a few centuries later.

The datings are up to 200 years older than the oldest known ironworking sites in England, northern Germany and Poland.¹

On Kjelmoøy, a tiny island in Varangerfjord facing the Arctic Ocean north of Kirkenes in east Finnmark, remains of knife blades, arrow points and fish-hook points of iron have been found in the occupation layers. These layers are dated to the middle of the first millennium BC. During the same period iron was also worked at settlement sites on the upland plateau of inner Finnmark, in northern Finland, northern Karelia and near Arkhangelsk in Russia.²

These settlements, where iron working took place and iron tools were in use, also contain pottery and tools of quartz and quartzite which testify to contacts and common cultural features all the way from northern Scandinavia through Finland and Karelia to the Volga–Oka–Kama area near Gorki, east of Moscow. Between about 900 and 300 BC the latter area was the centre of an early metal culture based on the production of bronze and iron. Knowledge of iron had been transmitted from the region north of the Black Sea.

Iron objects were also circulating in Denmark in the late Bronze Age but the oldest finds of iron slag and blast ovens are dated to around 500 BC. The same applies to England, northern Germany and Poland. One has to go as far south as central Europe and the southern Hallstatt culture in Austria-Hungary to find traces of iron production as old as those of central Sweden.

When iron production gained ground in southern Scandinavia a different technology was used and production took place on a larger scale. In the north iron was produced for the individual household in small pits in the ground, possibly also in specially made, asbestos-tempered, earthenware bowls; doubts have, however, been raised about the latter method. In southern Scandinavia, on the other hand, shaft furnaces of clay were used and the slag was collected in pits in the ground beneath. Bog ore was plentiful and iron production rapidly increased. Both in the north and south of Scandinavia iron was to become an important factor in the social and political changes of the early Iron Age.

The Metal Age in the north

A few major settlement sites comprising numerous houses from the earliest Metal Age have been found in Finnmark (for example, at Mortensnes in Varangerfjord). Settlement sites from the last few centuries BC are, however, small and only traces of a few small houses or turf huts have been found on

1 E. Hjärthner-Holdar, *Järnets och järnmetallurgins introduktion i Sverige* (Uppsala, 1993), p. 160.

2 T. Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden', in N. Norrbäck (ed.), *Finlands Historia*, 1 (Helsingfors, 1993), pp. 9–270; B. Olsen, *Bosetning og samfunn i Finnmarks forhistorie* (Oslo, 1994), p. 132.

them. Some of these sites are situated on the outermost coast, such as the islands of Kjelmøy and Kjeøy off Kirkenes. They were clearly occupied during the summer season for hundreds of years in connection with hunting and fishing expeditions, and may have been used continuously until recent times when they were the summer residences of the Pasvik and Neiden Sami, respectively.³

Recent excavations at Slettnes on the island of Sørøya in western Finnmark indicate that a new tradition of house-building was established within the same period: small, round houses resembling the historically known Sami dwellings of the so-called *gamme* type were used along the coast.

Small settlement sites have been investigated in the interior, along the Pasvik valley towards Lake Enari in Finland and along the River Alta on the upland plateau of Finnmarksvidda, and these were probably used during autumn hunting expeditions. People had become far more mobile, and the migration pattern known from the Sami population of Finnmark in historical times may have been introduced as early as the first millennium BC.

In recent centuries each local Sami family group, or *siida*, frequently had a specific territory which stretched from the outermost coast to the interior, though there were also distinctly inland communities. In the first case, the principal settlement of the *siida*, used by the entire group in winter, was located at the head of a fjord whereas individual families moved between small spring, summer and autumn settlements. If a similar pattern existed in the early Iron Age it can be expected that large winter settlements will sooner or later be discovered innermost in the fjords or along the river systems of the interior.

Closer contact with neighbouring societies and a similar material culture developed over large parts of northern Scandinavia. In Swedish Norrland remains of large base settlements have been found in the forests near the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia, and numerous inland and upland settlements testify to the utilisation of resources in the highlands westwards towards what is now Norway. There the hunters from the east met hunters from the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. Remains of settlement sites have also been uncovered along the major rivers of northern Finland, particularly the Ule and the Kemi. Hunting, fishing and gathering were the principal occupations in north-western Norrland and northern Finland whereas in central Norrland and southern Finland fields were tilled and livestock were kept.⁴

3 Olsen, *Bosetning*, pp. 99, 122; A. Hesjedal et al., *Arkeologi på Slettnes: Dokumentasjon av 11.000 års bosetning* (Tromsø, 1996), pp. 221–39.

4 E. Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid – ett historiskt perspektiv* (Wiken, 1992), p. 99; Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden', p. 151.

Bronze and iron objects of eastern origin were probably status symbols and prestige goods in the northern Scandinavian culture. They were dispersed by exchange of gifts and barter among population groups with a wide-ranging network of contacts. It has been suggested that the exchange of goods may have included salt and seal oil from the Gulf of Bothnia, the White Sea, and the fjords of northern Norway, and furs and hides from the forests and highlands. The demonstrable exploitation of the interior can be explained by the demand for hunting products to be used as objects for barter.

Kinship alliances and marriages among neighbouring groups were probably common, and would lead to the exchange of objects, ideas and knowledge. Control over prestige goods, metal, iron technology and hunting products as well as the spread of shamanism, led to considerable social differentiation. Contacts with more stratified societies to the south and east sowed the seeds for a new social organisation in northern Scandinavia. The new settlement pattern, the round houses of the *gamme* type and the burial practice are elements characteristic of the historically known Sami culture.

The pre-Roman Iron Age in the south

The Celtic culture had little impact on Scandinavia in the earliest Iron Age but from the last few centuries BC prestige wares of Celtic, Etruscan and early Roman origin, such as bronze vessels and weapons, have been found in Denmark, southern Sweden and southern Norway. There was a northward shift in the trading network between southern Scandinavia and central Europe which would gradually come to mean much for the transformation of the northern Germanic societies.

During the late Bronze Age and the earliest Iron Age, the climate in northern Europe gradually became cooler and damper (see Chapter 1) and in southern Scandinavia greater effort was probably needed to maintain agricultural production at the same level. At the same time the population was increasing and the external supply of bronze was decreasing. These changes may have led to the breakdown of the stratified Bronze Age chiefdoms before the middle of the first millennium BC. At the onset of the early Iron Age it appears that a more egalitarian tribal society with few traces of social stratification had come into being.⁵

5 L. Hedeager, *Danmarks jernalder: Mellom stamme og stat* (Århus, 1990), p. 161; L. Hedeager, *Iron Age Societies: From Tribe to State in Northern Europe* (Oxford, 1992).

The change mentioned can be best studied in Jylland on the basis of settlement development, burial rites and the kinds of objects sacrificed. For the first time there is now evidence of hamlets consisting of several farms. Late Bronze Age settlements were scattered but are assumed to have had some kind of joint organisation. Early Iron Age hamlets and villages, on the other hand, consisted of a number of small, individual farming units. The best investigated village is situated near Grøntoft in western Jylland where a large number of house sites of the period from the fifth to the second centuries BC have been excavated.⁶

Close to each village there were large fields divided into small plots, probably belonging to individual farms. Each production unit seems to have been a family holding with its livestock in its own byre and with separate plots for the growing of barley, oats and a little rye. At the same time the village formed a larger unit to which each family had to relate and this would necessitate a great deal of cooperation and common organisation. With cows in the byre for part of the year it became easier to collect sufficient manure for the fields and it is clear that agricultural production became more intensive and called for a greater work effort than during the Bronze Age.

In the pre-Roman Iron Age ground was cleared for increasing numbers of villages resembling that near Grøntoft. The forest disappeared over large areas and the soil became exhausted, perhaps leading to an ecological crisis where the soil was poorest. Many farms and villages were abandoned, particularly in the sandy districts of western Jylland where house sites and fields have remained undisturbed to the present day. Such conditions may have led to southward migrations. Roman writers tell of battles with the Germanic tribes – the Cimbri, Teutones and Ambrones – which were defeated by the Roman army near Marseilles in southern France and on the Po plain in northern Italy in 101 BC.

The inhabitants were buried in simple, flat cremation graves close to the villages or beneath low earth mounds. The impression left by the graves – as by the houses, farms and fields – is one of equality and uniformity. The finds seem to reflect a simple agricultural society with traits common to each region.

Finds from the pre-Roman Iron Age are much more sparse in southern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland so that conclusions have to be based

6 S. Hvass, 'Bebyggelsen', in S. Hvass and B. Storgaard (eds.), *Da klinger i muld... 25 års arkæologi i Danmark* (Århus, 1993), pp. 187–94; M. Rasmussen and C. Adamsen, 'Bebyggelsen', *ibid.*, pp. 136–41.

on a few local, detailed studies and comparisons with Jylland. However, this was everywhere a period of population growth, settlement expansion and a differentiated utilisation of resources.

Modern archaeological and scientific research has refuted the time-honoured view that a deteriorating climate caused economic and social stagnation. Climatic change was slow, and was prevented from having dramatic consequences by technological improvements and an advanced cultural and social organisation. Recent investigations have shown that the difficulties in finding and identifying evidence for early Iron Age communities have been due not to stagnation but to the practice of simple cremation burials, building techniques that left few visible traces above ground level, and a relatively simple material culture.

Large numbers of Bronze Age and early Iron Age house sites have recently been uncovered in Rogaland in south-western Norway and in Skåne. The remains of these dwellings show that the style of the buildings and the form of the settlements closely resembled those of Jylland in the same period.⁷

Evidence of the development of an early Iron Age cultural landscape, which in many ways resembles that of Jylland, has also been found on Gotland. Large, continuous field units divided by banks into smaller plots, called Celtic fields, once covered large parts of the island. A single field unit can measure at least 200–250 ha. A calculation of the population based on the size of the related cemeteries and the assumed grain production implies that each settlement unit may have had between fifty and 100 inhabitants.⁸

A similar settlement pattern was probably common for large parts of southern Scandinavia in the pre-Roman Iron Age. Nevertheless, the settlements may well have been differently organised in the various districts, depending on local natural and cultural conditions, and both villages and separate farms may have been present within the same area. The shape and size of the fields also varied from region to region.⁹

Along the coasts of southern Norrland in Sweden and Nordland in northern Norway animal husbandry and cultivation of grain were widespread but at

7 T. Løken, 'Bygg fra fortiden: Forsand i Rogaland. Bebyggelsessentrum gjennom 2000 år', *Ams-Småtrykk*, 21 (Stavanger, 1988); S. Tesch, *Houses, Farmsteads, and Long-term Change: A Regional Study of Prehistoric Settlements in the Köpinge Area, in Skåne, Southern Sweden* (Uppsala, 1993); N. Björhem and V. Säfvestad, *Fosie IV: Bebyggelsen under brons- och järnålder* (Malmö, 1993).

8 S.-O. Lindquist, 'The development of the agrarian landscape on Gotland during the early Iron Age', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 7:1 (1974), pp. 6–32.

9 M. Widgren, *Settlement and Farming Systems in the Early Iron Age: A Study of Fossil Agrarian Landscapes in Östergötland, Sweden* (Stockholm, 1983).

the same time fishing, hunting and gathering constituted an important part of the economy. Some groups may have practised seasonal migration from coastal settlements to settlements in inland districts and the highlands, while others may have had a more stable lifestyle in districts where opportunities for cultivation and fishing were good. Clearly, these northern coastal regions were mixing grounds for the southern and northern Scandinavian Iron Age cultures.¹⁰

In coastal districts of southern and western Finland there is evidence of a population whose material culture differed in several ways from that revealed by inland finds of northern Scandinavian character. Traces of wooden houses with roof supports and daubed walls have been found in the settlements but it has not as yet been possible to determine the shape and size of the buildings. Both cultivation and animal husbandry are well documented. Metal objects of bronze and iron have been found in a few settlements together with evidence of iron production. A wide range of jewellery, weapons and tools of bronze and iron have been found in graves, hoards and sacrificial sites; they are of types known from the Mälars district of Sweden as well as Estonia and elsewhere in the Baltic region. The finds reflect a well-established agrarian culture going back to the Bronze Age within a region where the climatic and geological conditions were most favourable for growing crops.¹¹

A meeting of three traditions

Great differences in pre-Roman Iron Age material culture have thus been documented in various regions of Scandinavia. The contrast is particularly striking when the village society in Jylland is compared to the hunter and fisherman culture in Finnmark. No sharp demarcation can be drawn between the northern and southern cultural areas but the archaeological material shows similar traits within large parts of both the north and the south. The archaeological evidence provides a basis for discussing cultural and social conditions as well as ethnic and linguistic groupings in Scandinavia in the early Iron Age.

The southern Scandinavian agrarian cultures found in Denmark, on Bornholm, Öland and Gotland, on the Swedish mainland as far north as the Mälars valley, and up to Trøndelag in Norway have been found to have a number of features in common. These include a stable settlement pattern consisting of farmsteads and villages and a culture which shares many similarities with

10 R. Bertelsen, *Loføten og Vesterålens historie fra den eldste tida til ca. 1500 e.Kr.* (Tromsø, 1984); Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid*, p. 114; B. Wik, *Helgelands historie*, 1 (Mosjøen, 1985).

11 Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden', p. 152.

the area that is now northern Germany. Throughout this northern European region it is possible to demonstrate cultural continuity from the Bronze Age to the Roman Iron Age, and the population can probably be linked to a Germanic culture and an emerging Scandinavian language area (see Chapter 4).

In the coastal districts furthest south and west in Finland there are traces of another agrarian culture that bears many similarities with the material culture around the Gulf of Finland, Estonia and the northern Baltic. Finnish researchers believe that this Iron Age culture belongs to a population that spoke an early form of Baltic Finnic.

The early northern Scandinavian metal culture found in Finland, northern Sweden and northern Norway has many features in common. This was a hunting and fishing culture with contacts eastwards with Karelia and Russia. It may have consisted of groups speaking a proto-Sami language.¹²

The southern Scandinavian culture seems to have gradually gained a foothold in Trøndelag and along the coast of Nordland in Norway and from Uppland northwards along the Baltic coast of Sweden, a tendency which became stronger during the Roman and later Migration (AD 400–600) periods. Influence from the south also made itself felt in the material culture of inland parts of southern Finland. This suggests that the proto-Scandinavian and proto-Finnish cultures and languages gradually spread northwards and were accepted in central Norway and Sweden and in inland districts of Finland, respectively.

Towards the end of the pre-Roman Iron Age comparable cultural and social developments can be recognised in Denmark, southern Norway and southern Sweden. Some graves have a richer selection of goods, including weaponry, jewellery and imported bronze vessels. Villages became larger and some farms and houses stand out on account of their size. Sacrificial remains found in peat bogs sometimes include valuable imported objects manufactured in the Celtic region, Italy and south-eastern Europe. The richer archaeological finds from the final centuries BC foreshadow the dramatic social changes that were to become apparent in the Roman Iron Age when the egalitarian agrarian societies of southern Scandinavia developed into warlike chiefdoms.

¹² Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid*, p. 110; C. Carpelan, 'Samerna', in Norrbäck (ed.), *Finlands historia*, 1, pp. 178–80; C. Carpelan, 'Kvänerna', *ibid.*, pp. 223–4; B. Olsen, 'Comments on Saami (Lapps), Finns and Scandinavians in history and prehistory', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 18 (1985), pp. 13–18; P. Sammalahhti, 'A linguist looks at Saami prehistory', *Acta Borealia*, 2 (1989), pp. 3–11; L. Liedgren, *Hus och gård i Hälsingland: En studie av agrar bebyggelse och bebyggelsesutveckling i norra Hälsingland Kr.f.–600 e.Kr.* (Umeå, 1992); O. S. Johansen, *Synspunkter på jernalderens jordbrukssamfund i Nord-Norge* (Tromsø, 1990). cf. Chapter 4 below.

Chieftoms, AD 1–500

On the border of the Roman Empire

The Roman territorial conquests north of the Alps in the last century BC and the first century AD left Scandinavia bordering an empire which was to exist for almost 500 years.

As a result of major battles in the northern part of the Continent the boundary between the Germanic peoples in the north and the Roman Mediterranean culture in the south came to follow the Rhine. However, this was not a sharp demarcation line. Gradually, Germanic tribes in the border area were Romanised and at the same time close links were established between continental and Scandinavian chieftains and tribal leaders. Alliances, marriages, exchanging of gifts, barter and wars probably helped to build a network of contacts that stretched from the limits of the Roman Empire to northern Scandinavia.

The Romans themselves were interested in improving their relations with the chieftains of Scandinavia, partly to obtain allies against the warlike barbarian tribes on the Continent and partly to gain access to the resources and raw materials of the north. The Romans created their own network of contacts by making gifts to Germanic chieftains, educating their sons in the Roman Empire, and making use of Germanic mercenaries.

The rich Scandinavian archaeological evidence and the descriptions by Roman writers of Germanic tribes show the great extent to which the Scandinavian peoples were influenced by Roman culture. Some elements of Roman culture were incorporated directly but often they were adapted to the native culture and given a new content.

In southern Scandinavia, as in other areas bordering the empire, it appears that the political organisation gradually changed from simple tribal and kinship societies to chieftoms and kingdoms. Scandinavia was not an area that was isolated from events in the rest of Europe but one where new forms of society grew up as a consequence of close contacts with the empire. Gradually, this would come to have dramatic consequences for both the Roman Empire itself and the peoples of Scandinavia.

Settlement and economy

The tendency towards greater social inequality increased during the Roman Iron Age. Burial practices clearly show that the leading families set themselves off by the richness of their grave goods. These comprised Roman products such as weapons, bronze vessels, glass beakers and precious metals, especially gold, as well as indigenous jewellery, gold objects, pottery and utensils of

high quality. Other burials contain grave goods of moderate standard but the majority are just as simple and poor as in the pre-Roman Iron Age. The principle of equality at the threshold of death was no longer practised.

In Denmark, the south of Sweden and Norway, and on the Baltic islands of Bornholm, Öland and Gotland this tendency is apparent already in the early Roman Period. The central and northern parts of the Scandinavian peninsula followed rapidly and in the late Roman period important chiefdoms seem to have been established as far north as Lofoten/Vesterålen in Norway, Medelpad/Ångermanland in Sweden, and parts of Finland.

In the past few decades major excavations of farmsteads and villages have confirmed the great social differences suggested by the grave finds. This is shown by the size of houses and farms, the number of stalls for livestock, and the size of storerooms for animal fodder and food for the people. Presumably, ownership rights to fields and grazing were unequally divided. The carefully investigated settlement of Hodde in south Jylland, dating from around the beginning of the Christian era, is a classic example of how the farmstead of an important person was established in an otherwise uniform village.¹³

There is good evidence in Denmark that the houses of each farm in the village became separately enclosed by fences in the early Roman period. In this way, private ownership can be seen to have replaced the communal system that had previously been practised. This is most clearly shown in the totally excavated village of Vorbasse in central Jylland. Around AD 200 Vorbasse was replanned so that the houses and farmyards of each of the twenty farmsteads were placed on either side of a street.

Farms in southern and central Norway and Sweden had similar buildings and enclosed home fields. The three-aisled longhouse, divided into several living rooms and a byre for the livestock, became common in the south in the early Roman period. After AD 200 this type of construction is found as far north as northern Ångermanland in Sweden and the Tromsø district in Norway. The principal houses on the major farmsteads could be very large (for instance 60 m long at Borg in Lofoten and 40 m long at Gene in Ångermanland). The largest Iron Age house known in Scandinavia is 90–100 m long and is located in Jæren in Rogaland in south-western Norway. After AD 200 each farm had separately enclosed home fields which might contain both arable land and meadow but most frequently only arable land in the form of large, continuous areas,

¹³ Hvass, 'Bebyggelsen'.

rectangular or more irregularly shaped. Private ownership of land and farms seems to have become established.

In Rogaland and Skåne farms were in some places parts of villages of the same character as those found in Jylland. However, in Norway and Sweden individual farms are usually found loosely linked together by systems of walls or separated from one another by outlying land.¹⁴

Everywhere the communal type of village was replaced by family farms which are estimated to have housed five to ten persons. The largest farms had buildings that covered almost 1000 square metres, about half of which was dwelling space and must have housed twenty-five to fifty persons. The largest Danish villages may have had up to 200 inhabitants.

Archaeological evidence, then, reveals a stratified society in which more or less permanent centres of economic and political power gradually became established. Agriculture was the main economic support of the population of southern Scandinavia and settlement on farms or in hamlets and villages was based on private ownership of land and livestock. The conscious planning of villages around AD 200 would seem to indicate the presence of a system of organisation and government that went beyond the village community. The system may have been intended to control and secure economic contributions from a population which probably consisted of freeholders and tenant farmers along with bondsmen and other landless people. The richest finds and sites probably derive from an aristocracy that got its income from land. There was an extensive exchange of goods with the Roman area. Crafts, local production of goods and technological advances seem to reflect increasing specialisation of labour in the principal settlements.

In Norway and Sweden physical and environmental conditions were extremely varied and favoured the exploitation of other resources, too. From the early Roman Period there is archaeological evidence for marked changes in settlement and resource exploitation both on the coasts and in the forests and highlands. In outlying areas, which had shown little trace of earlier people, human activity increased in the centuries prior to AD 500. This took the form of fishing along the coast of western Norway; iron production, and reindeer and elk hunting in the highlands and forests of southern Norway and inner

¹⁴ Bertelsen, *Lofoten og Vesterålens historie*; D. Carlsson, *Kulturlandskapets utveckling på Gotland: En studie av jordbruks- och bebyggelsesförändringar under järnåldern* (Visby, 1979); L. Hedeager, 'Danernes land. Fra ca. år 200 f.Kr. – 700 e.Kr.' (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldeendal og Politikens historie*, 2, København, 1988), pp. 1–374; B. Myhre, 'Beregning av folketall på Jæren i yngre romertid og folkevandringstid', in G. Olafsson (ed.), *Hus, gård och bebyggelse* (Reykjavik, 1983), pp. 147–64; Widgren, *Settlement and farming systems*.

Norrland; and animal husbandry and summer dairying in the upland valleys of Norway.¹⁵

Political development

The significant social changes mentioned above should be viewed in the light of local history. The change from a communally-run village to private ownership of land and livestock had probably begun before the Roman period, and would lead to an unequal distribution of the production surplus and the beginnings of social stratification. Heads of villages and other local leaders may quickly have exploited their positions to further establish their power when contacts with the Roman Empire were made in the first centuries AD.

About AD 100 Tacitus wrote in his *Germania* that the central political body among the Germanic tribes was the assembly of the people which, at various levels in the community, elected a chieftain and his retinue of warriors (*comitatus*) among those of noble birth or the aristocracy of the tribe. The chieftain and his retinue formed a fundamental institution in Germanic society, one which had military as well as political and judicial authority. The chieftains were probably also religious leaders. The Romans called the tribal chieftain *rex* and the one in charge of the warriors in a war situation was called *dux*. *Rex* and *dux* could be one and the same person. The Romans had contact with such leaders in both war and peace, sometimes as allies and trading partners, sometimes as foes.

In view of later accounts of the Germanic peoples on the Continent and in Scandinavia it is assumed that their societies were organised in tribes living in specific areas.¹⁶ The leader of the tribe was a chieftain or petty king whom the Goths referred to as a *reiks* ('leader of men') and who was elected by a tribal

15 T. Bjørge et al., 'Arkeologiske undersøkelser i Nyset–Steggjavassdragene 1981–1987', *Arkeologiske rapporter fra Historisk Museum, Universitetet i Bergen*, 16 (Bergen, 1993); O. Blehr, 'Traditional reindeer hunting and social change in the local communities surrounding Hardangervidda', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 6:2 (1973), pp. 102–12; O. Farbrege, L. Gustafson and L. F. Steinvik, 'Undersøkelser på Heglesvollen: Tidlig jernproduksjon i Trøndelag', *Viking*, 48 (1985), pp. 103–29; H. Jacobsen and J. H. Larsen, *Dokkfloys historie: Dokkfloy fra istid til kraftmagasin* (Lillehammer, 1992); A.-K. Lindquist and P. H. Ramqvist, *Gene: En stormannsgård från äldre järnålder i Mellom Norrland* (Umeå, 1993); B. Magnus, 'Fisker eller bonde? Undersøkelser av hustufter på ytterkysten', *Viking*, 38 (1974), pp. 68–108; B. Magnus, 'Iron Age exploitation and high mountain resources in Sogn', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 19:1 (1986), pp. 44–50; G. Magnusson, 'Lågtekisk järnhandtering i Jämtlands län', *Jernkontorets Bergshistoriska Skriftserie*, 22 (Stockholm, 1986); P. H. Ramqvist, *Gene: On the Origin, Function and Development of Sedentary Iron Age Settlement in Northern Sweden* (Umeå, 1983).

16 B. Myhre, 'Chieftains' graves and chiefdom territories in South Norway in the Migration Period', *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, 6 (1987), pp. 169–87; P. Sawyer, *När Sverige blev Sverige* (*Occasional Papers on Medieval Topics*, 5, Alingsås, 1991).

council consisting of the aristocracy. The *reiks* would lead judicial proceedings and cult activities, and had a retinue of warriors to back up his decisions and actions. The aristocracy and leading families of the tribe wielded great influence through the tribal council. Under special conditions, such as war or periods of unrest, several tribes might join together in a federation under the leadership of a council consisting of several *reiks* and a war leader whom the Goths called a *kindins*.¹⁷

The power of the chieftains and the aristocracy was clearly based on their disposal of land and agricultural surpluses. There is also archaeological and written evidence for the exchange of gifts and goods between the Romans and the Germanic peoples, for widespread plundering and attacks by Germanic forces in the border area, and for the payment of tribute to Germanic chieftains.

Special Roman products such as glass beakers, bronze cauldrons, and bronze and silver wine-serving sets were clearly prestige objects which added to the chieftains' power and status. They seem to indicate contacts and alliances with the Romans and must have played a major role in the exchange of gifts and the building of alliances among Germanic dynasties both on the Continent and in Scandinavia. Some of the status wares were obviously manufactured close to the Roman border and intended specifically for the northern Germanic peoples. Most of the finest objects remained in Denmark and were often deposited as grave goods whereas wares of ordinary quality were exchanged once more with the chieftains of northern Scandinavia.¹⁸

It was important for the Romans to maintain peace with the northern Germanic tribes, and the exchange of gifts and payment of tribute to the Germanic chieftains were part of this strategy. However, trade was also of interest to the Romans. Writers report that slaves, hides, skins, furs, goose feathers, amber, rock crystal (quartz), precious stones, and the blonde hair of women were in great demand. Undoubtedly, the army and the towns along the border (*limes*) were also in great need of raw materials and food and of strategically important products such as iron.

Such wares could partly be produced or manufactured in the Danish area but others had to be brought from northern Scandinavia. The strong position

17 U. Näsman, 'Analogislutning i nordisk jernalderarkæologi', in P. Mortensen and B. M. Rasmussen (eds.), *Fra stamme til stat i Danmark, 1: Jernalderens stammesamfund* (Århus, 1988), pp. 123–40; P. H. Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv på regional variation och samhälle i Nordens folkvandringstid', in C. Fabech and J. Ringtvedt (eds.), *Samfundsorganisation og regional variation: Norden i romersk jernalder og folkevandringstid* (Århus, 1991).

18 U. L. Hansen, *Römischer Import im Norden* (København, 1987).

gradually obtained by Danish chiefdoms and petty kingdoms was probably not only based on their own raw materials and production but also to a large extent on their ability to act as middlemen in the exchange of goods between the Roman Empire and northern Scandinavia.

The considerable exploitation of outlying land that can be demonstrated in Norway and Sweden must to some extent have been caused by the needs of the local population in the nearest settlements. Nevertheless, the distribution of iron ingots in the central regions implies that the initiative and driving force came from the need among the chieftains and aristocracy for wares which could be exchanged with the petty kingdoms further south. The overriding objective of the aristocracy was to ensure that the much sought-after outfield resources could be transformed into prestige goods and status objects to be used in gift exchanges, at banquets, and for other acts of generosity.

Military aspects

Characteristic of the archaeological material of the Roman and Migration periods is that weapons and other war equipment are found as both grave goods and sacrificial offerings. Society was dominated by a martial ideology. The graves richly furnished with status goods, including weapons and imported objects of Roman origin, probably belonged to the chieftains and their retinues of warriors. Military equipment – such as weapons, armour, warships, horses, and the personal articles of soldiers and chieftains – stands out among the many sacrificial finds uncovered in peat bogs in Jylland and Fyn, dating from AD 200 to 500. The composition of the finds makes it possible to reconstruct army detachments of several hundred men, including cavalry, bowmen and leaders. The make-up of the detachments and their equipment, often including Roman weaponry, shows the influence of the Roman army and its fighting methods. In the same period huge defensive constructions were built, including rows of stakes blocking fjords, walls, palisades and fortified villages.¹⁹

Concentrations of hillforts are found in central areas of south Norway, Sweden and Finland. Walls that have partially collapsed were built to defend the summit plateaus of easily defensible hill tops. Excavations inside

19 C. Fabech, 'Samfundsorganisation, religiøse ceremonier og regional variation', in Fabech and Ringtvedt (eds.), *Samfundsorganisation og regional variation*, pp. 283–304; F. Rieck et al., 'Landets forsvar', in Hvass and Storgaard (eds.), *Da klinger i muld*, pp. 210–13; M. Ørsnes and J. Ilkjær, 'Offerfund', *ibid.*, pp. 215–22; A. Nørgård Jørgensen and B. L. Clausen (eds.), *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in a European Perspective, AD 1–1300 (Publications from The National Museum, Studies in Archaeology & History, 2, Copenhagen, 1997)*.

the walls have uncovered small settlements, indicated by houses, structures, hearths and occupation layers. Such hill tops seem to have been settled or used as fortifications during various prehistoric periods but most of those investigated were intensively used in the late Roman and Migration periods. In flat landscapes, such as Öland and Gotland, ring fortresses surrounded by high earthworks or walls were constructed.²⁰ The fortifications functioned in various ways. Some were built along the limits of densely populated areas, others in their centres. Some obviously guarded lines of communication, others were garrison barracks, and yet others provided refuge for the farming population.²¹

It must have been possible to gather large armies for battles. The largest fortress on Gotland, Torsburgen, is a clear example of military organisation and warlike conditions. It is surrounded by a rampart almost 2 km long, constructed at the beginning of the Christian era and strengthened during the fourth century AD to reach a height of about 7 m. Calculations show that at least 1,000 men were needed to defend the fortress, a high figure considering that the population on Gotland was about 8,000. To be successful a siege would need many more attackers than defenders.²² The ability to assemble large forces in times of crisis is also reflected by the numerous hillforts and fortified settlements found in central areas of Norway and Sweden. In Jylland huge collections of weapons, sufficient for equipping more than 200 warriors, appear to have been sacrificed on a single occasion. Such sacrifices show that armies of between 500 and 1,000 men may have taken part in battles in eastern Jylland.

Concentrations of large boathouses have been found along the shores of western and northern Norway. They were probably intended for warships that resembled vessels known from discoveries in Danish and Norwegian bogs (for example, the Nydam ship from AD 300–350 and the Kvalsund ship from the seventh century AD). The largest boathouses had sufficient space for ships more than 30 m long with crews numbering around fifty men. The boathouses were generally situated close to important estates and political centres and probably formed part of a conscription system organised by the chieftains. Being narrow and propelled by oars, the ships were unsuitable for battles at sea; rather they were built for rapid transportation of warriors in times of crisis. The

20 K. Borg et al., *Eketorp: Fortification and Settlement on Öland / Sweden. The Monument* (Stockholm, 1976).

21 Myhre, 'Chieftains' graves'.

22 J. Engström, 'Fornborgerna och samhällsutvecklingen under mellersta järnåldern', in Fabeck and Ringvedt (eds.), *Samfundsorganisation og regional variation*, pp. 267–76.

number of men required to man the warships that belonged to the boathouses found in central parts of Rogaland has been estimated at between 600 and 800.²³

Economic and political centres

Attempts have been made to identify economic and political centres by mapping richly furnished graves, large villages and settlement areas as well as concentrations of imported prestige articles of bronze, glass and gold. In Denmark Stevns on Sjælland, Gudme on Fyn, Dankirke in Jylland, and Sorte Muld on Bornholm are particularly well-investigated key locations.²⁴

In Sweden potentially important regions are Skåne, Öland and Gotland, Götaland, Svealand and central Norrland. In Norway the Oslofjord region, the south-western part of the country from Agder to Hordaland, parts of Møre and Trøndelag in central Norway, and Lofoten/Vesterålen in the north stand out. Each of these regions contains several core areas with rich finds, indicating the possible existence of several centres at the same time. In the light of later and more reliable written evidence a number of these regions emerge as chiefdoms and petty kingdoms which struggled among themselves for more extensive power over people. Clearly their roots go back to the political centres of the Roman and Migration periods.²⁵

The political leaders in the regions mentioned – the petty kings, the chieftains and the aristocracy – probably wielded power through political institutions such as the tribal council and the council of federated tribes, and in their capacity as leaders of retinues, public assemblies (*'things'* < ONþing) and cult activities. In this fashion they would control settled areas, resource exploitation and production, and organise the exchange of goods, raids and defence. Prestige articles and other goods, ideas and knowledge were exchanged between the Continent and Scandinavia through a wide-ranging network of contacts and a system of alliances among tribal leaders.

Political conditions were probably unstable with shifting alliances and struggles for power between persons and families both within the chiefdoms and petty kingdoms and externally among tribal areas and 'folklands'. Expansive,

23 B. Myhre, 'Boathouses as indicators of political organization', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 18:1–2 (1985), pp. 36–60.

24 L. Jørgensen, 'The warrior aristocracy of Gudme: The emergence of a landed aristocracy in Late Iron Age Denmark?', in H. Gjøstein Resi (ed.), *Produksjon og samfunn: Om erverv, spesialisering og bosetning i Norden i 1. årtusen e.Kr.* (Oslo, 1995), pp. 205–20.

25 Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv'.

competing societies appear to have struggled for control over people and resources in adjacent territories. Wars, plundering expeditions and the taking of slaves were important sources of income for those in power. The evident importance of weapons, military equipment and forts reflects the warfaring spirit and ideology that characterised these societies.

Fundamental conditions for the political development described above were the technological and social changes that occurred at the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. It has been suggested that a kin-based society slowly disintegrated and opportunities arose for enterprising people to operate more individually to the advantage of just a few persons or families. A new political arena was created when the Roman Empire established its borders at the edge of the Germanic territories and demand grew for goods, services and resources. Such conditions were of great significance for the tribes in the area that is now Denmark.²⁶ At first they took advantage of the resources available in southern Scandinavia, but increasing demand drew ever larger areas of northern Scandinavia into the network. Germanic social organisation was well suited to taking advantage of the new opportunities, and political, social and economic changes rapidly occurred as far north as Troms and Ångermanland. The warlike, expansive Germanic societies soon found themselves in conflict with each other and with neighbouring ethnic groups and societies to the north and east.

Finland

Archaeologists and linguists agree that southern and western Finland – south of a line between Viborg in the east and Vaasa in the north-west – was populated in the pre-Roman Iron Age by people who spoke a Baltic Finnic language (see Chapter 4). During the Roman and Migration periods these simple farming societies changed in a similar way to what has been shown to have taken place in Sweden and Norway. For a long time their burials and grave goods were the most important sources of our knowledge of these people, but recently settlements and forts have also been investigated and scientists have studied the development of vegetation, settlement and occupations. The fertile agricultural districts of Finland proper, Uusimaa (Nyland), Åland, Satakunta, Häme (Tavastland) and southern Österbotten stand out as separate cultural areas with fairly clear boundaries with the forested regions of the interior and the north. Graves and burial practices, settlement sites, types of houses and

²⁶ Hedeager, *Iron Age Societies*.

building traditions, pottery, and ordinary household articles were of local or general south-west Finnish character. They testify to a culture which differed manifestly from that of the Swedish area.²⁷

As in Sweden and Norway the men's graves in the Finnish areas in question were, in the Roman and Migration periods, characterised by weaponry of various kinds, particularly spearheads, shields and a few swords. In most of the Roman Period the weapons were of types that were common in Germanic areas, but in the fifth and sixth centuries local weapons were manufactured for use by both leaders and ordinary farmers.²⁸ Some articles imported from the Roman area are found in graves dating from both the early and late Roman periods, including bronze vessels, glass and a few coins. Such finds used to be interpreted as evidence of merchants or chieftains from Sweden or Gotland who settled within the Finnish area in order to organise the exchange of goods. Today a better grasp of the greater amount of data available has led to a different interpretation, namely that the richest graves belonged to local chieftains and heads of families who formed a landed, Finnish-speaking élite with extensive external contacts.

The first chiefdoms appeared in the Roman Period in central parts of south-west Finland, Finland proper and Nyland. In the Migration Period southern Österbotten stands out as the dominant area; it had extensive contacts and exchanged goods with the petty kingdoms of Norrland and the Mälars valley in Sweden. Österbotten was called *Kainuu* (Finnish) or *Kvenland* (ON) in the Middle Ages, and may have been the core area of the Finnish-speaking tribe called Kvens (ON *kvenir*), mentioned in early accounts as an expansive group in northern Scandinavia.²⁹ There are, however, other views on this.

The growth of Finnish chiefdoms in Österbotten and south-west Finland must be understood in the light of the need for goods and services within the Roman Empire and the Germanic petty kingdoms on the Continent and in southern Scandinavia. Leading Finnish families exploited their geographical position by acting as middlemen between, on the one hand, the petty kingdoms on the Swedish mainland and the Baltic islands, and, on the other, the Baltic, Finnish and Sami peoples in the north and east. From the central coastal areas there was a gradual expansion along rivers and lakes into the interior of

27 Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden'; Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv'; M. Schaumann-Lönnqvist, 'Skandinavisk og kontinental import som indikatorer på sociala strukturer i Finland under yngre romersk järnålder och folkvandringstid', in Fabeck and Ringtvedt (eds.), *Samfundsorganisation og regional variation*, pp. 75–84.

28 S. Pihlman, 'Vapenproduksjon og socialgrupper i Finland under 400- och 500-talet', in Resi (ed.), *Produksjon og samfunn*, pp. 163–74.

29 Carpelan, 'Samerna' and 'Kvänerna'; Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden'.

Finland, rich as it was in elk, reindeer, fur-bearing animals and iron. Bartering developed with the Sami who lived there.

The Sami area

Until recently the abundant evidence of a rich metal culture in northern Scandinavia in the centuries preceding the Christian era – involving the use of copper, bronze and iron, and extensive production of iron – seemed to have come to an end in the early Roman Period.³⁰ In view of the above-mentioned excavations at Slettnes in western Finnmark this interpretation can no longer be upheld. A more mobile settlement pattern, smaller houses and less use of lithic material appear to be the reasons why so few sites have been found by archaeologists. At Slettnes iron production and the use of iron tools continued in the Iron Age.

Settlement sites have been found and investigated along the coasts, beside rivers and lakes in forested areas, and in the highlands. But the finds consist of simple tools of quartz, bone and antler which are still difficult to date other than by scientific methods. Sacrificial sites and graves are known from the Viking Age and the Middle Ages but few have so far been found from the Roman and Migration periods. Nevertheless, continuity in the economy and the settlement pattern can be recognised everywhere. A prominent example of this is the huge Sami burial ground at Mortensnes at Varangerfjord. Here more than 200 graves in a scree seem to span an unbroken period from before the birth of Christ to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries.³¹

Despite poor preservation conditions on the settlement sites it is clear that hunting and fishing were the dominant means of support in the north. At Slettnes and other sites along the coast of northern Troms and Finnmark pits lined with flagstones have recently been excavated and interpreted as contraptions for rendering the fat of whales and seals. Bones of elk and especially reindeer dominate in inland districts and some semi-domesticated reindeer may have been kept, at least for use as decoy and draught animals. There is general agreement that many aspects of Sami culture known from the early Modern Period appeared and were developing during this phase.³²

30 Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid*, p. 145; Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden', p. 177; Olsen, *Bosättning*, p. 138; Hesjedal et al., *Arkeologi på Slettnes*, pp. 229–33.

31 E. J. Kleppe, 'Archaeological material and ethnic identification: A study of Lappish material from Varanger, Norway', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 10:1–2 (1977), pp. 32–46.

32 Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid*, p. 115; Bertelsen, *Lofotens og Vesterålens historie*, p. 46; I.-M. Mulk, *Sirkas: ett samiskt fångstsmåhåll i förändring Kr.f.–1600 e.Kr.* (Umeå, 1994); Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv'.

As mentioned above, a strong agrarian society was established during the Roman and Migration periods along the coasts of Nordland and southern Troms in northern Norway and in southern and central Norrland in Sweden. Place-names, linguistic and archaeological evidence suggest that the dominant language was Germanic. According to earlier research this was a consequence of extensive immigration from western Norway and the Mälars region, respectively. The immigrants were believed to have gradually driven a Sami-speaking population towards the interior and the north. In more recent research this explanation has been rejected as too simplistic. An internal transformation is thought to have taken place in response to contacts and interactions with communities to the south, furthered by the exchange of goods, social relations and wars, or by small-scale migrations.³³

Could it be that these coastal settlements of Nordland and Norrland already had a Germanic-speaking population which changed its culture and social character to comply with the pattern dominant in the adjacent regions to the south? Another hypothesis is that in the pre-Roman Iron Age the coast was populated by people with a mixed economy who spoke proto-Sami. Some of them changed their ethnicity and culture in response to contact with the Germanic peoples further south, and built farms in the areas that were best suited for agriculture. Others maintained their contact with the Sami-speaking peoples and evolved into the Sami hunting and fishing societies that are later known in the fjord districts, the inland regions and the highlands of central and northern Scandinavia. A variant of this hypothesis is that the population of central Scandinavia prior to the Roman Iron Age spoke an unknown language and that the ethnic and linguistic divisions into proto-Sami and proto-Scandinavian took place in the early Roman Iron Age as a consequence of contacts to the north and south, respectively.³⁴

A development similar to that which occurred in the northern Scandinavian coastal regions may have taken place in the forested interior further south, in the Swedish–Norwegian border area between Norrland and Träslöv/Värmland. Graves and settlement sites dating from the start of the Christian era have been found to show both Sami and Scandinavian features. It is possible that

33 B. Magnus and B. Myhre, 'The concept "Immigration" in archaeological contexts illustrated by examples from west Norwegian and north Norwegian early Iron Age', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 5:1 (1972), pp. 45–60; Bertelsen, *Lofotens og Vesterålens historie*, pp. 46–50; Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv', p. 199; Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid*, p. 115.

34 K. Odner, 'Finner og Terfinner: Etniske prosesser i nordre Fenno-Scandinavia', *Occasional Papers in Social Anthropology*, 9 (Oslo, 1983); K. Odner, 'Ethnicity and traditions in northern Fenno-Scandinavia', *Acta Borealia*, 2 (1992), pp. 21–36; I. Storli, *Stallo-boplasser: Spor etter de første fjellsamer?* (Oslo, 1993).

an originally proto-Sami population either took up elements of Germanic culture or that it changed its ethnic affinity as a consequence of external contacts.³⁵

During the Roman Period inland resources were exploited more intensively by the chiefdoms of northern Norway, Trøndelag, northern Sweden and Finland. As time went by, they came into conflict with each other in the border zones and clashes of interests must have arisen with the Sami people. The conflicts may have been resolved by war and suppression but also by agreements, alliances and cooperation. For instance, there are indications of agreeable relations between northern Norwegian chieftains and the Sami in the Viking Age and the early Scandinavian Middle Ages. Both groups appear to have benefited from the exchange of goods that went on within a redistributive economic system.

Petty kingdoms, AD 500–800

Scandinavia as part of Germanic Europe

Shortly after the fall of the western Roman Empire in 476 Germanic tribes established kingdoms which comprised most of southern and western Europe. At the beginning of the sixth century three kingdoms stood out as the strongest: the Ostrogothic kingdom of Theoderic in Italy, the Visigothic kingdom in Spain and southern France, and the Franks under King Clovis.³⁶

The Germanic royal families justified their power by using origin myths, tales of tribal history and a common Germanic political ideology. These were handed down orally in the form of legends and poetry and expressed in literature and material culture. According to the traditions of Goths, Lombards and Anglo-Saxons many of the tribes claimed to have originated in Scandinavia whence they migrated to the Continent and England. Their royal families traced their ancestry back to pagan Germanic dynasties and gods.

The collective memory among the Germanic peoples, expressed in contemporaneous written sources, is supported by archaeological evidence, notably weapons, jewellery and decorated objects. The animal ornamentation style I of the Migration Period shows identical features throughout Scandinavia, southern England and the Continent from France to Hungary and the Ukraine.

35 I. Zachrisson, 'Comments on Saamis (Lapps), Finns and Scandinavians in history and prehistory', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 18:1–2 (1985), pp. 19–22.

36 L. Hedeager and H. Tvarnø, 'Romerne og germanerne', in S. Mørch (ed.), *Det Europeiske Hus*, 2 (København, 1991), pp. 180, 209.

Style II of the sixth and seventh centuries was established as a common Germanic pattern of ornamentation from northern Italy and Spain to northern Scandinavia. Stylistic elements consisting of persons, animals and mythological creatures illustrate heathen gods, such as Odin and Freyr, and legends and tales that were common to all the Germanic peoples. They give expression to an ideology of power that does not vary much from the Scandinavian to the Merovingian, Anglo-Saxon and Lombard kingdoms.³⁷

The close contacts between the ruling families of southern Scandinavia and those of the continent are reflected in a few surviving accounts. In his *Getica* from 551, Jordanes, building on the lost history of the Goths (*Historia Gothorum*) written by Cassiodorus at the request of King Theoderic in 525, mentions King Rodwulf who had formerly ruled over a number of tribes in southern Scandinavia but had renounced his kingdom and sought the support of Theoderic. Jordanes also gives the names of twenty-eight Scandinavian tribes in a manner that reveals good geographical knowledge of Scandinavia.

The much later Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* may draw on traditions that had their roots in the fifth and sixth centuries when it tells of battles between Danes, Swedes and Goths, of their royal dynasties, and of possible family ties between the ruling dynasties of the Wulfingas in East Anglia and the Wuffingas who lived across the sea north of the Danes, perhaps in western Sweden or south-eastern Norway.³⁸ In his history of the Franks (*Decem libri historiarum*), written from the mid-570s to 593–4, Gregory of Tours relates that the king of the Danes, Chlochillaich, landed with his fleet in the kingdom of the Franks in the early sixth century but was repulsed and killed.

From the sparse written and rich archaeological material it is evident that the Germanic societies of southern Scandinavia adopted certain cultural elements from the Christian kingdoms on the Continent and in England, and in the sixth and seventh centuries gradually developed a political organisation that was greatly influenced by these kingdoms. This may explain why older layers of the medieval provincial laws of Scandinavia have several features in common

37 A. Andrén, 'Guld och makt – en tolkning av de skandinaviska guldbrakteaternas funktion', in Fabech and Ringvedt (eds.), *Samfundsorganisation og regional variation*, pp. 245–58; M. Axboe, 'Guld og guder i folkevandringstiden: Brakteatene som kilde til politisk/religiøse forhold', *ibid.*, pp. 187–202; L. Hedeager, 'Europe in the Migration Period: The formation of a political mentality', in F. Theuvs (ed.), *Ritual and Power from the Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1997).

38 S. Newton, 'Beowulf and the East Anglian royal pedigree', in M. Carver (ed.), *The Age of Sutton Hoo* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 65–74.

with the pan-Germanic legal system that is known from the seventh century onwards.³⁹

In the Germanic societies the ability of the king as a war commander and a charismatic and generous leader would determine the support he could muster. Royal power was based on a strong retinue recruited from the upper echelons of society. In a solemn ceremony the retainers swore fealty to the king who, in return, undertook to maintain and support them. Helmets, ring swords and other ornamented status objects found in richly furnished warrior graves from France and southern England to Finland may be symbols of rank that were handed over by the king as part of the rituals of allegiance. These objects probably expressed the same ideas and attitudes in Scandinavia as they did on the Continent. They seem to confirm that the petty Scandinavian and Finnish kingdoms aspired to the ideology and political organisation that was characteristic of the Franks.⁴⁰

The seventh century – a dark age?

The rich archaeological finds of the Migration Period have provided a basis for detailed interpretations of economic, social and political conditions in Scandinavia. After c. 550 the archaeological material becomes much less spectacular. In many areas richly furnished graves are not to be found any more. The deposition of hoards and sacrificial offerings of gold rings and jewellery appear to have been discontinued and large numbers of farms seem to have been abandoned. For a long time archaeologists were of the opinion that the period from the late sixth century and throughout the seventh century was one of depression in central parts of Scandinavia. An expansive and extrovert society based on a large population and powerful chieftains now went into decline. The economic and political basis of the aristocracy was weakened and there were fewer contacts abroad. The causes of the assumed crisis were sought in external factors such as a poorer climate, migrations and changes in trade routes, and partly also in internal factors such as soil exhaustion, overpopulation, civil wars and societal collapse. The waves of plague epidemics starting with the Justinian plague in 541, which greatly reduced the population of Europe, were also thought to have reached southern Scandinavia and to have contributed to the crisis there.⁴¹

39 O. Fenger, 'Fra stammeret til statsbegreb', in P. Mortensen and B. M. Rasmussen (eds.), *Fra stamme til stat i Danmark, 2: Høvdingesamfund og kongemagt* (Århus, 1991), pp. 289–95.

40 H. Steuer, 'Helm und Ringschwert: Prunkbewaffnung und Rangabzeichen germanischer Krieger', *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, 6 (1987), pp. 189–236.

41 U. Näsman and J. Lund (eds.), *Folkevandringstiden i Norden: En krisetid mellem ældre og yngre jernalder* (Århus, 1988).

More recent investigations have led to a rejection of the crisis hypothesis. In Denmark it has been shown that some villages, such as Vorbasse and Nørre Snede in Jylland, were in use continuously from the Migration Period to the Viking Age. The number of farms in such villages may have been reduced in the eighth century but on the other hand buildings and farms occupied larger areas. The large and central Danish settlements of the Migration Period were still in use throughout the seventh and eighth centuries.⁴² In Sweden similar settlements have been found at Vä, Uppåkra and Helgå in Skåne and on the island of Helgö in Lake Mälaren. It has been suggested that such places were the principal seats of the aristocracy or kings and functioned as religious, economic and political centres.⁴³

On the islands of Öland and Gotland large numbers of Migration Period house sites and entire farms have been preserved but many of these seem to have been abandoned at the end of the sixth century. Recent and detailed investigations show that in the Merovingian Period the population became more concentrated to the best agricultural areas. The changes in the settlement pattern and the cultural landscape have been used as evidence of a decline in the population and of an agrarian crisis at the transition between the Migration and Merovingian periods (c. AD 600). Several Swedish archaeologists are now critical of the crisis theory and claim that changes in settlement pattern and land-use may have taken place for other reasons.⁴⁴

Recent investigations at Borre in Vestfold are an example of how intensive studies of a central agrarian area may lead to a new understanding of the development of settlement in the seventh century. Borre has long been known as a Viking Age cemetery with a number of very large mounds. It has now been shown that the earliest mounds were built in about AD 600 and the others in the following centuries up to about 900. Pollen analyses and landscape studies demonstrate continuity in land-use and settlement in the surrounding area since the early Iron Age.⁴⁵

From about AD 600 cultivation was intensified, large fields came into use, the woodland disappeared, and new kinds of herbs and crops were introduced. Few artefacts, house sites and graves are known from the Borre area. Nevertheless, instead of a dramatic stagnation in the seventh century an expansion

42 Hvass, 'Bebyggelsen'.

43 J. Callmer, 'Hantverksproduktion, samhällsförändringar och bebyggelse: Iakttagelser från östra Sydsandinavien ca 600–1100 e.Kr', in Resi (ed.), *Produksjon og samfunn*, pp. 39–72; Jørgensen, 'The warrior aristocracy'.

44 Carlsson, *Kulturlandskapets utveckling*; Näsman, 'Analogislutning'.

45 B. Myhre, 'The royal cemetery at Borre, Vestfold: A Norwegian centre in a European periphery', in Carver (ed.), *Age of Sutton Hoo*, pp. 301–13.

of settlement and the development of an intensively worked agrarian landscape can now be demonstrated. This transformation of the landscape coincided with the building of the first large mounds, probably over the graves of members of a political élite – chieftains or petty kings.

Intensive studies of settlement sites still remain to be carried out in important agricultural areas of southern and western Norway, and the settlement pattern and farm structure of the early part of the Merovingian Period are still not known. Consequently, the crisis hypothesis involving a decline in the population in response to economic changes or plague cannot be refuted. But recent archaeological excavations on the outermost coast and in highland districts show that fishing, summer dairying and other forms of resource utilisation in marginal areas increased rather than declined in the seventh century. This would seem to suggest the presence of a considerable population in the central agricultural areas, too. The paucity of known occupation sites and farms from the earliest part of the Merovingian Period in southern Norway may therefore be due to lack of research rather than a prehistoric crisis.⁴⁶

Continuity of occupation has been demonstrated on farms and settlement sites in northern Norway and south-western Finland; the settlement pattern of the Migration Period was continued without any trace of a restructuring of the agrarian landscape similar to that suggested in southern Scandinavia. However, in southern and central Norrland (Sweden) the expansive settlement and resource utilisation of the period prior to AD 500 seems to have come to a sudden end. Following intensive archaeological investigations there is agreement that the petty kingdoms of Norrland disintegrated in the seventh century.⁴⁷

Rich grave finds testify to the presence of core areas and centres of power, but it is also possible to view such burials as symbolic expressions of a politically unstable situation in which various families and factions were struggling for power and attempting to legitimise their positions through burials and rituals. An absence of rich graves may therefore sometimes be taken as an indication of political strength. When political stability prevailed, it may no longer have been possible, or necessary, for competing families to try to outdo each other by amassing an abundance of material symbols in their graves. Such conditions may explain changes in burial practices in seventh-century Denmark, southern

46 B. Myhre, 'The beginning of the Viking Age – some current archaeological problems', in A. Faulkes and R. Perkins (eds.), *Viking Revaluations* (London, 1993), pp. 182–216; B. Myhre, 'Rogaland forut for Hafrsfjordslaget', in *Rikssamlingen og Harald Hårfagre: Historisk seminar på Karmøy 10. og 11. juni 1993* (Karmøy, 1993), pp. 41–64.

47 Baudou, *Norrlands förntid*; Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv'.

Norway and southern Sweden. The continuation of the old practice of richly furnished graves in northern Norway and Trøndelag, south-west Finland, and on Bornholm may indicate that the political instability of the Migration Period continued on the fringes of Scandinavia. In the stronger kingdoms of southern and central Scandinavia power rested with an élite which, to a greater extent, had freed itself from competition.⁴⁸

It is conceivable that the continuation of the earlier social and settlement conditions in northern Norway and in Finland throughout the seventh and eighth centuries was connected with the political development in southern Scandinavia. Kingdoms of continental Germanic character would here exploit their intermediary position between the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons and Franks in the south and the more peripheral petty kingdoms in the north. The chieftains of northern Norway and Finland maintained their redistributive economic structure and continued their expansive exploitation of resources, profiting from contacts and trade southwards along the coasts to Trøndelag and south-west Norway and to Svealand and the Baltic region, respectively. But in Norrland the petty kingdoms or chiefdoms appear to have collapsed. This may have been due to competition for resources from the centres along the Norwegian coast, in Finland and in the Mälars region.

Scandinavian centres

Recent excavations in Ribe in Jylland have thrown light on the economic and political development of southern Scandinavia in the Merovingian period. Finds from thick occupation layers testify to the presence of an early centre for extensive craft work as well as local and long-distance trade. Right from its earliest phase the settlement was organised and planned with roads and work plots. Coins in the form of *sceattas* occur from the first half of the eighth century. Imported glass, lava quern stones and wheel-turned pottery bear witness to trade with the Continent; whetstones and soapstone were imported from Norway. In the crafts' quarter were manufactured glass beads, jewellery and brooches of bronze and precious metals, pieces of amber jewellery, and antler combs. On the basis of coin finds and archaeological and dendrochronological dating the oldest phase of the trading centre has been placed at 704–10.

In the first part of the eighth century defensive work was carried out on Danevirke ('fortification of the Danes') at the base of Jylland, west of Hedeby,

⁴⁸ U. Näsman, 'Det syvende århundrede – et mørkt tidsrum i en ny belysning', in Mortensen and Rasmussen (eds.), *Fra stamme til stat*, 2, 165–80.

along with major construction projects such as the Kanhave canal on Samsø. As mentioned above, large estates were established and villages reorganised in Jylland and large settlement centres appeared both there and on the Baltic islands. Among these was the estate of a local chieftain at Dankirke, only 7 km south of Ribe. Such archaeological monuments testify to a political and economic organisation that reached beyond the region, and it has been suggested that a Danish kingdom with its centre in Jylland may have exercised territorial power over most of present-day Denmark, Skåne and Bohuslän (see Chapter 8b). Some time prior to 714 the English missionary Willibrord travelled 'to the wild Danish tribes' (*ad ferocissimos Danorum populus*) and their king, Ongendus. He may have met the king who founded Ribe.⁴⁹

The largest group of monumental grave mounds in Scandinavia is the one already mentioned at Borre in Vestfold. Here nine mounds measuring between 32 m and 45 m in diameter and 5 m and 7 m in height lie close to the shore of Oslofjord. A richly furnished ship burial from about 900 was excavated in one of the mounds in 1852, leading to the assumption that the entire burial ground dated from the Viking Age. We have seen that recent studies show the mounds to span a longer period, from c. 600 to c. 900; they may represent one mound per generation. The burial ground is situated at a strategically important spot where it was possible to control traffic in and out of Oslofjord. The Borre mounds may contain the graves of royal dynasties that had their power rooted in Vestfold and based much of their economy on controlling trade between Denmark and the inland valleys and highland areas of southern Norway. Limited investigations carried out in the port of Kaupang in Skiringssal in southern Vestfold, mentioned in Ohthere's account from about 890 (see Chapter 6), have revealed activity from the late eighth century. Older phases may still remain uncovered at Kaupang but a trading centre from the Merovingian Period should perhaps also be sought closer to Borre.

Some unusually large grave mounds were constructed in the inner part of south-eastern Norway in the Merovingian Period. They generally have a central position in the best agricultural districts, close to rivers or important land routes. One of them is Raknehaugen in Romerike, the largest burial mound in Scandinavia, measuring nearly 95 m in diameter and 12 m in height. Such huge monuments probably mark out centres of inland kingdoms. For the rulers on the coast it was important to enter into alliances with these

49 M. Bencard and L. Bender Jørgensen, *Ribe Excavations 1970–76*, 4 (Esbjerg, 1990); S. Jensen, *Ribes Vikinger* (Ribe, 1991); P. Sawyer, *Da Danmark blev Danmark* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarks Historie*, 3, København, 1988).

kingdoms in order to ensure the flow of wares and raw materials from the valleys and upland settlements.⁵⁰

In the course of the same period many comparable mounds were built in Götaland and Svealand in Sweden; they were generally situated separately in rich agricultural areas. Close to the old church of Uppsala, in the heart of the province of Uppland, three of the largest Swedish grave mounds occupy a central position in a large prehistoric cemetery. Two of them have been excavated and found to contain simple cremation burials from around 500 and the early sixth century, respectively. Old Uppsala was the religious and political centre of the Swedish Viking Age kings, and had probably been so since the Migration Period. The higher sea level at that time made it possible for boats to get close to there from Lake Mälaren along the Fyris valley. Near Old Uppsala the waterways met tracks coming from the interior with its rich resources. Spectacular finds from the Merovingian Period have been made in the immediate vicinity of this old centre, including the very special burial grounds at Vendel and Valsgärde with boat graves and grave goods that can be compared with those of Sutton Hoo in East Anglia. These may be the burials of a landed aristocracy that controlled some of the exchange of goods between inland districts and the Baltic.⁵¹

A contemporary central settlement and market site has been investigated on the island of Helgö in Lake Mälaren. A dense agglomeration of dwellings, warehouses and workshops was uncovered. The considerable craft activity comprised bronze casting, goldsmith work, and the production of jewellery, glass beads, antler combs and iron objects. The finds reveal a wide-ranging network of contacts, including a Buddha figure from India, objects from the Baltic area, iron bars and schist whetstones from Norrland, a bishop's staff from Ireland, and glass from the Continent and southern England. Relief brooches and clasp buttons decorated in style I, cast in the Helgö workshops, have been found in south-west Finland. Helgö was probably the estate of a local chieftain or a trading and marketing centre under royal control. It should be viewed in the context of the central area around Old Uppsala.⁵²

In northern Norway Borg on the island of Vestvågøy in the Lofoten archipelago was a large estate as early as the Migration Period. At some time in the seventh or eighth century the main house was rebuilt as one of the

50 Myhre, 'The royal cemetery'; D. Skre, 'Raknehaugen', *Viking*, 60 (1997), pp. 7–42.

51 B. Ambrosiani, 'Background to the boat graves of the Mälaren valley', in J. P. Lamm and H. Å. Nordström (eds.), *Vendel Period Studies (Statens Historiska Museum Studies, 2, Stockholm, 1983)*, pp. 17–22.

52 A. Lundström (ed.), *Thirteen Studies on Helgö (The Museum of Antiquities, Stockholm Studies, 7, Stockholm, 1988)*.

largest buildings known from Iron Age Scandinavia. It was 83 m long, 9 m wide and perhaps 8–9 m high. It was sub-divided into several rooms, comprising a dwelling area, storage space and a byre for the livestock. One room, containing large hearths and cooking pits, has been interpreted as a hall used for banquets, sacrifices and religious ceremonies. This interpretation is partly based on the finds of ornamented pieces of sheet gold, outstanding pieces of continental pottery, and fragments of fifteen or sixteen glass beakers made in France, southern England and perhaps the Black Sea area. Near the longhouse several large boathouses, grave mounds and farms testify to dense settlement. The finds from Borg are of the same type and quality as those of the same period found in the rich agricultural areas of southern Scandinavia and on Helgö. Borg must have been the estate of a chieftain and an important centre in the region.⁵³

The large buildings and the find contexts at Borg give a good impression of the nature of the chiefdoms in northern Norway, particularly their resources and extensive contacts abroad. Between Namdalen on the northern edge of Trøndelag and the archipelago of Vesterålen (north of Lofoten) several economic and political centres are indicated by place-names, special artefacts, and monuments such as grave mounds, boathouses and large farmsteads. A special feature of these centres is the presence of large groups of houses arranged in a circle. They may have functioned as *thing* sites or barracks for the chieftain's boat crews and warriors. Many of the central estates of northern Norway were located near to the mouth of large fjords close to coastal sailing routes. They may have drawn their economic support from resources on the outer coast as well as in the forested and mountainous interior of northern Scandinavia. Several of these centres (for instance, Tjøtta in Nordland and Bjarkøy in Troms) are mentioned in later historical accounts as the seats of chieftains who played an important role in the Viking Age and in the early medieval process of the political unification of Norway.⁵⁴

We have seen that the chiefdoms or petty kingdoms of Norrland in Sweden, at the peak of their power in about AD 500, appear to have lost their influence in the seventh century. They may have lost control of the inland resources of central and northern Scandinavia to other chiefdoms and petty kingdoms, notably those of Trøndelag and northern Norway, and in the south to the Swedish kingdom in the Mälars valley. In Österbotten and south-west Finland

53 G. Stamsø Munch, 'Hus og hall: En høvdinggård på Borg i Lofoten', in G. Steinsland (ed.), *Nordisk hedendom: et symposium* (Odense, 1991), pp. 321–34.

54 O. S. Johansen and T. Søbstad, 'De nordnorske tunanleggene fra jernalderen', *Viking*, 41 (1977), pp. 9–56; Wik, *Helgelands historie*, 1.

agrarian settlement expanded considerably in the Merovingian Period, in former agricultural districts as well as forested areas. Characteristic jewellery and local varieties of weaponry were developed and iron production increased in the interior. Richly furnished graves reveal that the leading local families were still in contact with the Swedish area but at the same time a native Finnish material culture becomes more distinct. The collapse of the power of Norrland's petty kings and chieftains, at the same time as the settlement expansion in Österbotten appears to have been at its strongest, may have given the Finnish chiefdoms greater access to resources in the northern area.

In the Åland archipelago there was a marked expansion of settlement from the seventh century, and numerous house sites and farms have been excavated. Sailing routes between the centres in Finland and the Mälars region must have touched Åland and made it an important intermediate station for trade and barter across the Baltic. Finds of Baltic and east Finno-Ugrian character indicate that the southern Finnish chiefdoms also had important contacts eastwards with Karelia and what is now western Russia. Ship burials make it clear that large rowing and sailing ships were also built in Finland. Maritime traffic eastwards was probably organised by Finnish chieftains before the Swedish and Gotlandic dominance was established in the Viking Age.⁵⁵

Conclusion: Scandinavia as part of northern Europe

Following the collapse of the western Roman Empire Germanic kingdoms were established in western Europe. A more or less common Germanic ideology of power and social organisation gained the upper hand in England and Scandinavia as well as on the Continent. The Frankish kingdom of the Merovingians and subsequently of the Carolingians came to play a leading role in north-west Europe. The Franks gained supremacy over neighbouring kingdoms by military conquest, and their form of economic and political organisation set a standard to be imitated by other Germanic kingdoms including the Scandinavian ones. During their expansion in the seventh and eighth centuries the Franks developed a great need for subsistence and utility wares that had to be fetched not only from the Continent but also from the British Isles, Scandinavia and the Baltic region. In the seventh century early trading centres were established, partly under royal control, along the English Channel and the southern coasts of the North Sea, including Quentowic, Dorestad, Hamwic, London and Ipswich. As time went by, trade and other contacts

⁵⁵ J. Callmer, 'Interaction between ethnical groups in the Baltic region in the Late Iron Age', in B. Hårdh and B. Wyszomirska-Werba (eds.), *Contacts across the Baltic Sea* (Lund, 1992), pp. 99–107; Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden'; Pihlman, 'Vapenproduksjon'.

between the petty kingdoms of Scandinavia and the Franks and Anglo-Saxons were channelled through these centres.⁵⁶

Status goods such as glass beakers, pottery, bronze vessels and precious metals from the south were exchanged for prestige and utility goods such as furs, amber, hides, iron bars, schist for whetstones, soapstone, walrus tusks, antlers, quartz and slaves from the north. Central settlements such as Dankirke, Gudme, Sorte Muld and Helgå were the bases for this exchange. The petty kingdoms of northern Scandinavia were drawn into a wide-ranging network of contacts which embraced the peaceful exchange of gifts, marriage arrangements and the building up of alliances, as well as wars, plundering raids and the payment of tribute. Subsistence and utility goods were collected by local leaders and chieftains by virtue of their key positions in a regional redistributive system. Within the framework of banquets, feasts, religious ceremonies and gatherings, and the king's right to demand food and lodging on his travels, such goods could be converted into prestige wares. The estates of chieftains, such as Borre, Borg, Uppsala and Högom, or market places, such as Helgö, were the centres for such activities.⁵⁷

About AD 700 a Danish king established the trading centre of Ribe in Jylland. Kaupang in Vestfold, Birka in Mälaren and Hedeby at the base of Jylland followed shortly afterwards. The exchange of goods increased throughout northern Europe and gradually came to include larger quantities of subsistence and utility goods. Thus were sown the seeds for a market economy using coins and silver as means of payment. The extensive trading activities of the Viking Age were rooted in the dramatic political events of the Merovingian Period.

This was also the background for the increasingly intensive exploitation of resources in northern Scandinavia and the Baltic region. Settlement expanded in the forested and highland regions, and fishing settlements were established in coastal districts. The Sami came to play a major role in the local redistributive systems; this is indicated by many house sites, settlement sites and hunting contraptions found in inland districts and along the northern coasts. Artefacts found in graves and settlement sites along the coast of northern Norway also include objects from the Finnish and Baltic areas, implying that the exchange of goods now extended across the mountains from the Baltic to the Atlantic. This would open the way for conflicts between the Sami and the Germanic,

56 Callmer, 'Hantverksproduktion'; A. Christophersen, 'Kjøpe, selge, bytte, gi: Vareutveksling og byoppkomst i Norge ca 800–1000, en modell', in A. Andrén (ed.), *Medeltidens födelse* (Lund, 1989), pp. 109–45.

57 R. Hodges, 'Charlemagne's elephant and the beginning of commodisation in Europa', *Acta Archaeologica*, 59 (1989), pp. 155–68; U. Näsman, 'Om fjärrhandel i Sydskandinaviens yngre järnålder', *Hikuin*, 16 (1990), pp. 89–118.

Kven and Finnish settlers. Nevertheless, the Sami may have been protected by the chieftains on account of their important role in the redistributive system. What was later called the 'Finn [i.e. Sami] tax', collected by north Norwegian chieftains in the Viking Age and early Middle Ages, may have had its roots in the economic system of the Merovingian Period.⁵⁸

Due to its geographical situation the Danish kingdom was able to play a key role in the exchange of wares and the political development in northern Europe. Maritime traffic along the Norwegian coast in the west, in and out of Oslofjord, and to and from the Baltic had to pass Danish territory on its way to southern England and the Continent. The Danish kingdom must have attained its leading position within Scandinavia at an early date. Further north it appears that power was gradually concentrated in certain central regions, such as Vestfold and Østfold (on opposite sides of Oslofjord). Vestlandet, Trøndelag and Hålogaland in Norway; in Götaland and Svealand in Sweden; and in Österbotten and the south-western districts of Finland. The distribution of political power in the Viking Age and early medieval period, which appears in the earliest written accounts, is supported by eighth-century archaeological evidence.

Contacts were probably established among the ruling élites of Denmark, southern Norway and England in the Migration Period, along the southern coasts of the North Sea as well as across the open water. Seventh-century rowing vessels of considerable size are known from Kvalsund in Sunnmøre in Vestlandet and Sutton Hoo in East Anglia. Picture stones on Gotland may also indicate that sailing ships were known in Scandinavia from the sixth century. As we have seen, the exchange of goods was increasingly channelled through the trading centres on the southern shores of the North Sea, and the Scandinavian chieftains and petty kings grew more and more dependent on the social and political network built up by the Franks. The opening up of direct sailing routes across the Norwegian and North Seas from Norway to Shetland, Orkney and Scotland, and from Jylland to England, made possible trade and alliances between Norwegian, Danish and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, beyond the control of the Franks. The archaeological material on both sides of the North Sea suggests that such routes may already have been in use in the Merovingian Period.

In the early Merovingian Period there were great similarities in the culture, ideology and social organisation of Scandinavians, Franks and Anglo-Saxons.

⁵⁸ Mulk, *Sirkas*; Odner, 'Ethnicity and traditions'; Storli, *Stallo-boplasser*; Zachrisson, 'Comments'.

However, in the later part of the eighth century the distinction between the Christian kingdoms in the south and the pagan kingdoms and chiefdoms of Scandinavia became more pronounced. Anglo-Saxon missionary activity was intensified on the Continent and the Franks conquered Saxon areas in northern Germany up to the Danish border. The southern Scandinavian kingdoms may have felt themselves economically and militarily threatened by the expansion of the Franks. The unrest of the Viking Age, which, according to written accounts, started with attacks on England towards the end of the eighth century, could thus have its roots in economic and political conflicts around the North Sea.⁵⁹

59 J. Hines, 'Tidlig kontakt over Nordsjøen, og de bakenforliggende årsaker', in J. F. Krøger, and H. R. Naley (eds.), *Nordsjøen: Handel, religion og politikk. Karmøyseminaret 94/95*, (Stavanger, 1996), pp. 18–30; Myhre, 'The beginning of the Viking Age'.

Languages and ethnic groups

MICHAEL BARNES

The linguistic prehistory of Scandinavia

For as far back as we can see, the languages of Scandinavia (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) have been either of Indo-European or Finno-Ugrian origin. At what point these types of speech first established themselves in the region is not wholly clear. Human activity can be demonstrated in Scandinavia as early as 10,000 BC, but it is unlikely, on comparative linguistic grounds apart from anything else, that the language or languages spoken by the earliest inhabitants were the ancestors of any of those spoken today.

Recent scholarly opinion (based on the meagre linguistic and archaeological evidence available) suggests that a group of Indo-European speakers moved into what is now Denmark, southern Sweden and southern Norway some time in the second half of the third millennium BC (cf. Chapter 2), probably spreading quickly into northern Germany (if the move there was not simultaneous).¹ Such dating, however, is attended by many uncertainties and amounts to little more than educated guesswork. To add to the uncertainty, it has been argued by some that language change should be seen less in terms of mass migrations and more as a manifestation of cultural changes.² Historically, it is of course of great importance to know how a particular form of language came to be in a certain area at a certain time. But from a purely linguistic point of view it can only be concluded that somehow and at some time, probably not later than 2000 BC, but possibly earlier, Indo-European speech came to southern Scandinavia and northern Germany. The form of this speech would still have been close to the Indo-European parent language, it is thought, although the emergence of certain differences is assumed as a result of the gradual attenuation of linguistic contacts.

1 H. F. Nielsen, *The Germanic Languages. Origins and Early Dialectal Interrelations* (Tuscaloosa, 1989), pp. 35–6.

2 For example, C. Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language. The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (London, 1989, 2nd edn).

The innovations which established what we now call Germanic as a distinct branch of Indo-European, on the other hand, are considered to have taken place in the new homeland – in part, possibly, as the result of influence from one or more indigenous languages.³ Linguistic interference is certainly a plausible – though not a necessary – explanation for the radical changes in phonology and morphology that affected the developing Germanic, and could also account for the fact that approximately a third of its vocabulary is without cognates in other Indo-European languages. Whatever the non-Indo-European input, Germanic clearly became dominant in southern Scandinavia and northern Germany, wiping out virtually all traces of the earlier language or languages; the place-names of southern Scandinavia, for example, are almost entirely of Germanic origin, and of those few which are not, the majority have been interpreted as Sami (Lappish).

About the coming of Finno-Ugrian-speaking peoples to Scandinavia very little is certain and various hypotheses have been put forward. Comparative linguistics (for example, numbers of early Germanic loanwords interpreted as a reflection of language contact) and later areas of location have to some suggested that the ancestors of the Sami were the first Finno-Ugrian speakers to arrive, perhaps in the period 2000–1500 BC. Proponents of this view have hypothesised that the Sami made their way into what is now southern Finland by an overland route and subsequently moved northwards into present-day Lapland; but as late as the beginning of the Viking Age they are considered still to have been present in many parts of Finland, as well as in the northern half of Norway and Sweden. Not much later than these proto-Sami, and certainly long before the birth of Christ, various groups of people speaking forms of Baltic Finnic, which were to become the later Finnish and Karelian dialects, migrated into Finland, some going overland and some across the Gulf of Finland.

An alternative hypothesis that has recently gained ground envisages immigration by Proto-Finnic or Uralic speakers from the south into southern Finland at some unspecified date in the pre-Christian era, perhaps even as early as the end of the Ice Age. The subsequent split into Sami and Finnish is seen as the reflection of a cultural split into a primarily hunting and primarily farming community, between which there gradually arose a clear ethnic and linguistic boundary. From an archaeological point of view it has been suggested that the Typical Comb Ceramic culture, which spread over Finland in

3 E. Haugen, *The Scandinavian Languages. An Introduction to their History* (London, 1976), pp. 102–3; Nielsen, *The Germanic Languages*, pp. 28–32.

the late fourth millennium BC, belonged to proto-Finnic speakers, and that the contemporaneous slate culture of northernmost Scandinavia may mark the beginning of the ethnic identity of the Sami (Chapter 3). Whenever and however Finno-Ugrian speakers originally arrived in Finland, it seems most likely that they encountered an indigenous population, but here, like the Germanic speakers in Norway and Sweden, they obliterated virtually all traces of their language(s).

The existence of a large number of Germanic loanwords in modern Finnish in a form that is compatible with their having been borrowed before Germanic itself split into different groupings testifies to early contact between speakers of these two very different types of language. Given the apparent age of the loans, it is not impossible that some of this contact took place before the migration into Finland, but that will depend entirely on one's view of when the migration took place. Archaeological finds have suggested to some that there was a Scandinavian–Germanic immigrant population in Finland during the Bronze Age and even earlier,⁴ though others interpret these finds simply as evidence of contact between the two ethnic groups at the relevant period. Finno-Ugrian influence on Germanic has also been mooted.⁵ It is suggested that both the initial stress and the minimal tense system of Germanic (with its basic present–past contrast) may have been adopted as a result of contact in the Baltic area between speakers of the two types of language, but there is little evidence otherwise of far-reaching Finno-Ugrian penetration of Germanic, and these two points of similarity – striking as they are – are probably coincidental.

Finnish and Sami

Written records of Finnish, a few fragments apart, do not go back further than the sixteenth century, while Sami first appeared in written form in the seventeenth. Our conception of the development of these two branches of Finno-Ugrian therefore rests on comparison of their various post-Reformation manifestations with each other and with related languages.

Finnish appears from the start to have consisted of a number of different dialects, which broadly speaking can be divided into a western and eastern group. Speakers of these dialects gradually moved inland and northwards, possibly pushing the Sami before them and/or causing extensive language

4 P. Sammallahti, 'A linguist looks at Saami prehistory', *Acta Borealia*, 2 (1989), pp. 8–9; cf. Chapter 2.

5 For example, W. B. Lockwood, *Indo-European Philology* (London 1977, 3rd printing), pp. 123–4.

shift (though see below). To what extent they themselves were under pressure from speakers of Germanic during the first millenium of the Christian era is unclear: Germanic loanwords seem to have entered Finnish at different periods, but it is impossible to say whether the influence was continuous. It is not until the crusade of the latter part of the twelfth century that extensive Swedish political involvement in Finland begins.

Sami is now customarily divided into nine dialects. It is thought by some that the initial splits took place about AD 800,⁶ as a result both of voluntary migrations and of the encroachment of Finns and Germanic speakers, who gradually drove linguistic wedges between the natives. But it has also been argued that at the beginning of the Viking Age the dimensions of the Sami area were much as they are today, and that irregularities in Proto-Scandinavian loanwords indicate that there was already considerable dialectal differentiation in Sami at the time they were adopted.⁷

Germanic and Scandinavian

Northern Germany and southern Scandinavia, as has been indicated, are considered by virtually all linguists working in the field to have been the cradle of Germanic.⁸ The development of a characteristically Scandinavian form of this branch of Indo-European therefore has largely to do with the spread of Germanic to the east, south and west, with resulting linguistic splits between the different groups of speakers involved.

A gradual expansion, dated by many between 1000 and 500 BC, saw the frontiers of Germanic pushed as far south as the present-day Netherlands and central Germany and as far east as the Wisła (Vistula).⁹ It is reckoned that at this period all Germanic speakers still shared a common language (often called 'Common Germanic'), though probably with some dialectal differentiation. Around the beginning of the Christian era the Goths decamped far to the east and south, seemingly having been in the Wisła area for a period of time, although their original home may have been in Scandinavia as indicated by the place-names Gotland and Götaland, allegedly related to 'Goth'. Meanwhile, other Germanic tribes were moving down towards present-day

6 O. H. Magga, 'Samisk språk', in B. Molde and A. Karker (eds.), *Språkene i Norden* ([no place], 1983), p. 101.

7 Sammallahiti, 'A linguist', pp. 6–7.

8 Nielsen, *The Germanic Languages*, p. 36; C. Henriksen and J. van der Auwera, 'The Germanic Languages', in E. König and J. van der Auwera (eds.), *The Germanic Languages* (London, 1994), p. 1.

9 Nielsen, *The Germanic Languages*, pp. 36–7.

southern Germany and areas east of there, and in the fifth century came the migration of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes to England.¹⁰

The linguistic consequences of these migrations were several. First, there appears to have been a split between East Germanic (Gothic and related forms of speech) and the language of those who formed the remaining Germanic continuum extending from Scandinavia to central Europe. (The case for a split between East Germanic and Scandinavian on the one hand and a West Germanic branch on the other has been argued, but the linguistic and historical evidence seems to be against it.)¹¹ The language of the continuum has been dubbed 'North-west Germanic', but this has been a changing concept, sometimes embracing all Germanic speech outside Gothic and the other languages of the eastern branch, sometimes only Scandinavian and Ingvaenic or 'North Sea Germanic' (itself a fairly elastic term). Undoubtedly, as Germanic tribes and/or speech dispersed, dialectal differentiation will increasingly have developed. The earliest extant manuscript records (between the sixth and ninth centuries) certainly show considerable phonological, morphological and syntactic differences between different types of Germanic as well as a wide variety of idiom; these can hardly have appeared overnight.

A major problem in determining when North Germanic or Scandinavian can be said to emerge as a separate linguistic entity is posed by the language of the early runic inscriptions (AD 200–600). Most of these are found in Denmark, Norway or Sweden. They exhibit an archaic form of Germanic, and one which is remarkably homogeneous given the inscriptions' wide geographical and chronological spread. It has been argued¹² that this language is North-west Germanic, notwithstanding the fact that it is almost entirely found in Scandinavia, since the forms in the inscriptions could as easily give rise to reflexes in (at least some) West Germanic languages as in later Scandinavian. The argument alleges that characteristically North Germanic or Scandinavian features did not develop until AD 450, and that they hardly become visible in the inscriptions until AD 550 or later. This is to some extent a matter of perception. There is the contrary view that the retention of archaic features is what

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 36–63.

¹¹ Haugen, *The Scandinavian Languages*, pp. 107–13. In his *Germanic Languages*, Nielsen, on the other hand conducts a wide-ranging survey of the problems involved in grouping the Germanic languages, and decides that even now too little detailed work has been done for hard and fast conclusions to be drawn.

¹² For example, by E. H. Antonsen, *A Concise Grammar of Older Runic Inscriptions* (Tübingen, 1975), especially pp. 26–8; see more recently Nielsen, *The Germanic Languages*, pp. 5–12; Nielsen, 'On the dialectal split of Ingvaenic West Germanic from the early runic language of Scandinavia', in K. Düwel (ed.), *Runische Schriftkultur in kontinental-skandinavischer und -angelsächsischer Wechselbeziehung* (Berlin, 1994), pp. 117–27.

characterises the emerging Scandinavian. It has also been claimed,¹³ in opposition to the above, that the language of the inscriptions does contain a significant number of Scandinavian innovations: in phonology, morphology and word meaning.

It is certainly hard to make clear pronouncements about the linguistic affinity of some inscriptions. The Gallehus runic horn,¹⁴ perhaps from the period AD 350–400 and found in southern Jylland, has the sequence (transliterated):

ekhlewagastiz:holtijaz:horna:tawido

‘I Hlewagastiz, related to someone called *Holta* [?], made the horn.’ It would be hard to argue that southern Jylland, if that is where the horn was inscribed, was home to Scandinavian speech in the fourth century, and there is indeed nothing in the inscription that is incompatible with some later type of West Germanic or other. The pronominal form **ek** has been claimed as Scandinavian, but it also appears in Old Saxon and Old Low Franconian. The nom. m. sg. ending **-z** is lost by the time of the earliest written manifestations of what are clearly West Germanic dialects, but there is no way of knowing when the ending was dropped in any of them. The single-barred runic **h** used in the inscription has been contrasted with the double-barred variant found in continental Germania and Anglo-Saxon England, but the evidence for such a clear distinction in use has recently been shown to be tenuous.¹⁵

The Tune stone from Østfold in Norway,¹⁶ on the other hand, possibly from AD 300–400, may well contain characteristically Scandinavian features; for example, the nom. m. pl. in **-ez** (Gothic *-ai*, OE *-e* etc.), and the use of **arbija** in the probable sense ‘funeral feast’ (cf. Gothic *arbi*, OHG *erbi* ‘inheritance’, ON *erfi* ‘funeral feast’).

The question of what kind of Germanic was spoken in Scandinavia between the departure of the Goths from northern Europe and AD 550–600 cannot thus be answered conclusively one way or the other. In part it is a question of definition, in part it depends on interpretation of sparse and difficult source material. Many of the innovations which appear to have taken place in Scandinavian between AD 550 and 750 – the so-called ‘syncope period’ – may have started to develop much earlier, notwithstanding their absence from the inscriptions. We do not need the problematic assumption of a runic koine or traditional

13 O. Grønvik, *Runene på Tunesteinen* (Oslo, 1981), pp. 33–69.

14 L. Jacobsen and E. Moltke (eds.), *Danmarks runeindskrifter* (København, 1941–2), no. 12.

15 R. I. Page, ‘New runic finds in England’, in [no. ed.], *Runor och runinskrifter* (Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien. Konferenser, 15, Stockholm, 1987), p. 194.

16 W. Krause and H. Jankuhn (eds.), *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark* (Göttingen, 1966), p. 72.

spelling¹⁷ to make this plausible. The new vowel qualities ([æ] [ø] [y]) resulting from the distant vowel assimilation known as mutation, for example, would probably have gone unnoticed by speakers until the conditioning factors – unstressed /i/ /j/ /u/ /w/ – were lost and the mutated vowels phonemicised.¹⁸

The syncope period and the ‘differentiation’ of Scandinavian

It is the changes associated with the syncope period AD 550–750 that mark the emergence of a thoroughly Scandinavian form of speech. Syncope itself involved the loss of all unstressed short vowels unless protected by particular phonological environments. Other Germanic languages were affected by the trend as well, but not to the same extent. Mutation is also found in the various forms of West Germanic, but is not so widespread a phenomenon there as in Scandinavian. The diphthongisation known as breaking (which gives ON *jafn*, *jørð*, compared with German *eben*, *Erde*, English *even*, *earth*), is known from Old English as well as Scandinavian, but has somewhat different causes and results in the two types of speech. Entirely Scandinavian are such changes as the loss of initial /j/ and of /w/ before rounded vowels (ON *ár*, *orð*, German *Jahr*, *Wort*, English *year*, *word*) and loss of final /n/ (which meant that the large word groups of weak nouns, weak adjectives and infinitives came to end in a vowel rather than /n/, cf. ON *fara*, OE *faran*, German *fahren* ‘go, travel’). The characteristic suffixed definite article and -s(k) verb form (the latter with various functions, including reflexive, reciprocal, and passive) are also thought to have developed during the syncope period, but the first examples do not appear before the eleventh century.

The linguistic state after 700–750 is often known as Common Scandinavian. The uniformity suggested by this term may, however, reflect our lack of data as much as the real situation.¹⁹ The earliest extant vernacular manuscripts (Iceland and Norway: twelfth century; Denmark and Sweden: late thirteenth) confirm the existence of numerous and significant linguistic differences between the various areas of Scandinavia. Many scholars have in fact reckoned with an ‘East Nordic–West Nordic’ split from as early as the end of the syncope

17 M. Syrett, *The Unaccented Vowels of Proto-Norse* (NOWELE Supplement, 11, Odense, 1994), pp. 20–1, 30–1.

18 Haugen, *The Scandinavian Languages*, p. 152.

19 M. Barnes, ‘How “common” was Common Scandinavian?’, in K. G. Goblirsch et al. (eds.), *Germanic Studies in Honor of Anatoly Liberman* (NOWELE, 31/32, Odense, 1977), pp. 29–42.

period (East Nordic is roughly the language of Denmark and Sweden, West Nordic that of Norway and later of the Atlantic colonies such as Iceland), but while certain of the features on which this distinction is based were doubtless in being by about 700 (e.g. more extensive breaking in EN, cf. *jak* v. WN *ek* 'I'), some important ones were not. Thus, monophthongisation of the falling diphthongs /ei/ /au/ /øy/ to /e:/ /ø:/ /ø:/ can be seen from runic inscriptions to have begun in Denmark around 900 and to have spread into Sweden during the eleventh century.

How far the EN/WN classification represents the true state of affairs at any period is questionable. By the end of the Viking Age, as Christianity and manuscript writing became established, the developing Danish and Swedish clearly possessed a number of features that distinguished them from the developing Norwegian and Icelandic. Equally clearly, however, the speech of Jylland and Sjølland must already have been diverging from that of Götaland and eastern Sweden, since our earliest vernacular manuscripts from these areas, written some two hundred years later, document a host of linguistic differences.

Scandinavian and other languages in the Viking and Middle Ages

There has been considerable debate about the extent to which *post*-syncope Scandinavian and the other Germanic tongues of the North Sea area were mutually intelligible.²⁰ Much clearly hangs on the definition of intelligibility. The far-reaching structural and lexical similarities between Scandinavian on the one hand and Old Saxon, Old English and, as far as can be determined, Old Frisian on the other, seem likely to have made rudimentary communication possible without the need to resort to language learning, but it is hard to see how this can have risen much above the slow articulation of simple phrases accompanied by gesticulation.

The high level of mutual understanding between Old Norse and Old English implied by certain Icelandic sagas, for example, is contradicted by the difficulty the modern learner of the one language has in reading the other. The distance between the written manifestations of Old Norse and Old Saxon and of Old Saxon and Old English seems equally great. Some forms of each language may,

20 See the discussion in E. Simensen, 'Språkkontakt over landegrenser', *Collegium Medievale*, 7 (1994:1), pp. 33–50.

of course, have been more easily comprehensible to speakers of neighbouring tongues than others, but concrete evidence for such 'transitional dialects' is virtually non-existent. Several recent studies of language contact between Anglo-Saxons and Norse settlers in England postulate two forms of speech so different that a pidgin was needed to facilitate communication.²¹

²¹ See the survey in M. Barnes, 'Norse in the British Isles', in A. Faulkes and R. Perkins (eds.), *Viking Revaluations* (London, 1992), pp. 65–84.

PART II

*

FROM VIKINGS TO KINGS

The Viking expansion

PETER SAWYER

For 300 years, beginning at the end of the eighth century, Scandinavians, mostly from what are now Denmark, Norway and west Sweden, figure prominently in the history of western Europe, first as pirates and later as conquerors and colonists. In those centuries other Scandinavians, known as *Svear*, from east Sweden were active in similar ways in eastern Europe. The people these Scandinavians encountered described them in various ways. In western Europe they were often identified as Danes or Northmen, and were sometimes called heathens or gentiles. In the east the Slavs called the Scandinavian invaders *Rus*, a word derived from the Finnish name for the *Svear*. This word, variants of which were used in Arabic and Byzantine Greek, eventually gave Russia its name. In the ninth century it was only the English who called the invaders Vikings, originally a Scandinavian appellative – *vikingr*; a word that now has a wider meaning and is used to describe not only Viking warriors but also many aspects of Scandinavian society in what is commonly called the Viking Age.

The first recorded raids were on monasteries in the British Isles. In 793 Lindisfarne, an island monastery off the coast of Northumberland, was plundered. A year later raiders who attacked another Northumbrian monastery, probably Jarrow, were opposed and suffered losses. This resistance may have been the reason that in 795 Vikings attacked undefended island monasteries in the west: on Skye and Iona in the Hebrides, and Rathlin off the north-east coast of Ireland. The first recorded raid on the Continent, in 799, was also on an island monastery, St Philibert's on Noirmoutier, near the estuary of the Loire. One early incident that did not involve a church was in the reign of Brihtric, king of the West Saxons (786–802). The crews of three ships, later described as from Hordaland in Norway, landed in Portland on the south coast of England and killed a royal reeve who mistook them for merchants.

There must also have been raids on south-east England at this time, although none is reported until 835. As early as 792 the churches of Kent were obliged

to contribute to defences against pagan seamen, an obligation that is also mentioned in early ninth-century Kentish charters, one of which, dated 822, is extended to include the duty to destroy forts built by the pagans. Another indication that the Vikings threatened that part of England before 835 is a charter dated 804 granting land within the walls of Canterbury as a refuge for the nunnery of Lyminge, an exposed site near Romney Marsh.

Across the Channel, in 800 Charlemagne organised defences along the coast north of the Seine estuary against pirates who 'infest the Gallic sea'. As no attack on that coast is reported before 810 it is not possible to say when the raids began; Scandinavian pirates may have been a nuisance there for many years. It is, however, clear that by the last decade of the eighth century their raids had become so serious that rulers on both sides of the Channel took action against them. The Frankish defences were further strengthened in 811 after the Danes invaded Frisia in 810.

Causes

It has been argued that the pressure of increasing population in Scandinavia and the consequent shortage of land was the main cause of Viking activity. That may have been partly true of western Norway, where there were few reserves of land to be exploited: the earliest Scandinavian colonists were the Norwegians who began to settle in Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides at the end of the eighth century, if not before. The later colonisation of Iceland was also largely the work of Norwegians. In other parts of Scandinavia, however, there is no hint of population pressure in or before the Viking period. Most of the first generations of Vikings were seeking wealth, not land. Indeed, throughout the whole period one of their main purposes was to acquire treasure in the form of gold, silver, gems, precious objects or coins, which they obtained either directly as plunder or tribute, or indirectly by ransoming captives of high rank or selling slaves. In eastern Europe their purpose was to obtain furs and slaves to sell. Successful Vikings could also hope to gain a reputation for courage and skill as warriors or seamen, and some of their leaders, especially those who were political exiles, also hoped to attract sufficiently large retinues of warriors to enable them to win power in Scandinavia, or abroad as conquerors.

Norwegians probably began to settle in Orkney and Shetland towards the end of the eighth century but until the middle of the ninth century most of the Vikings who survived returned home. Later some settled permanently in areas they had conquered in the British Isles or in northern Frankia, or in

Føroyar, Iceland, or, towards the end of the tenth century, in Greenland (see Chapter 8(d)). Some were exiles, unable to return to their homelands, others found it more convenient to settle on land distributed by their leaders in areas that had been conquered or newly discovered. Some, including many of those who settled in the British Isles, Iceland or in Russia, must have been tempted by the prospect of having more land than they could ever hope to own or rent in Scandinavia.

A key factor in the outburst of piracy was, in fact, the commercial expansion in north-west Europe that began towards the end of the seventh century when there was a significant increase in trade between the Continent and England.¹ This led to the development of several relatively large trading places: Dorestad on the Rhine, Quentovic, near Boulogne, and in England, Hamwic (the precursor of Southampton), Fordwich (the port of Canterbury), London, Ipswich and York. This trade grew even faster after about 700 when the Frisians obtained a very large supply of silver from an unidentified source, possibly in the Harz mountains, enabling them to produce a huge coinage that was quickly spread widely on the Continent and in England.

Scandinavia and the lands round the Baltic were soon affected by this development, for the produce of that region, particularly furs, was highly prized in western Europe. The best quality furs came from regions with the coldest winters, and for western Europe Scandinavia and the lands east of the Baltic were an ideal source. Merchants could sail into the Baltic in the summer and buy them and other produce, such as beaver and otter skins, amber, eiderdown and good-quality whetstones, in the trading places that were established there during the eighth century. Most of the furs offered for sale in such places as Ribe, Birka, Wollin, Truso and, in the ninth century, Hedeby, were gathered as tribute from the Sami, Finns and Balts who inhabited the best fur-producing areas. Northern Russia, which was the main source of high-quality furs in medieval Europe, was already being exploited in the eighth century by Finns, Slavs, Balts as well as *Svear*. By the middle of that century a base for this activity, with a mixed population of Finns, Slavs and some Scandinavians, had been established at Staraja (Old) Ladoga on the river Volkhov, some twelve kilometres from its estuary in Lake Ladoga.

The commercial links between northern and western Europe had consequences that in their turn prepared the way for the Viking raids. First, increased familiarity with western European sailing ships was an important factor in the adoption of sails in Scandinavia. Although Saxons and their neighbours in

¹ I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450–751* (London, 1994), pp. 293–303.

Jylland may have begun to use sails in the fifth century, Gotlandic picture-stones suggest that oars were the normal method of propulsion for another two centuries. Secondly, thanks to contacts with western merchants, Scandinavians began to learn about the wealth of Europe and the conflicts between, and within, European kingdoms from which they were later able to profit. Thirdly, shipping in the Baltic provided opportunities for pirates who were in time tempted to extend their activities into the North Sea. There were also political consequences. Rulers and chieftains who were best able to exact tribute gained wealth and power, as did those who controlled the trading places, or the routes leading to them. The Danish kings, whose central territory was in Jylland and the adjacent islands, benefited most, for they controlled the entrance to the Baltic and could provide security for ships passing through Store or Lille Bælt. They were consequently able to attract merchants to Hedeby, their trading place at the head of the inlet of Schlei, conveniently close to the land route between Jylland and Saxony. The alternative channel into the Baltic, Öresund, was less attractive, partly because of strong currents, but also because of the threat of piracy; it was not directly controlled by Danish kings until the end of the tenth century.

There are various indications that in the first half of the ninth century Danish kings were acknowledged as overlords by many of the local rulers and chieftains in the lands around Skagerrak and Kattegat. Any who were unable to resist Danish power, and were unwilling to submit, could choose exile, a prospect made more attractive by the opportunity to win fame and fortune by taking part in, or leading, Viking raids. The Danes were particularly eager to have hegemony over Viken, the land flanking Oslofjord. This district was of great value for it was there that the Danes could obtain iron that was produced in Norway. If, as seems likely, the word Viking originally referred to the inhabitants of Viken it could explain why the English, and only they, called Scandinavian pirates Vikings, for England was the natural goal for men from Viken who chose exile as raiders rather than submit to the Danes.

At first most of the Vikings who operated in the north and west of the British Isles were from Norway. There is no contemporary record of Scandinavian activity in Orkney, Shetland, or the Hebrides in the early ninth century, but archaeological evidence suggests that there were already contacts between Norway and Orkney in the seventh century.² By the mid-ninth century there were extensive Norwegian settlements in the Hebrides as well as in the

2 B. Myhre, 'The beginning of the Viking Age: Some current archaeological problems', in A. Faulkes and R. Perkins (eds.), *Viking Revaluations* (London, 1993), pp. 182–204 followed by 12 pp. of figures.

Northern Isles, a colonisation that was only possible after any resistance by the native inhabitants had been overcome. Although the Norwegian invaders were so dominant in these islands that virtually nothing of the native culture survived, it has been claimed that evidence found in the excavation of some graves in Orkney implies peaceful cooperation between the Norwegians and the original inhabitants.

It is, therefore, likely that the Scandinavian conquests in the Northern and Western Isles began with the establishment of bases by the leaders of the first raids. Initially, the Danes concentrated on the southern North Sea and the Channel coasts. Although the distinction between these zones was blurred in the middle of the ninth century when Danes challenged Norwegians in Ireland, archaeological and linguistic evidence show clearly that it was predominantly Danes who settled in eastern England and that most of those who occupied land in Ireland, the Hebrides and the Northern Isles were from Norway.

Vikings in west Europe

For several decades the Vikings mounted what were, in effect, hit and run raids, and rarely ventured far from the sea. The defences organised by English and Frankish rulers were apparently effective; most reported raids were in Ireland until the 830s when the scale and extent of Viking incursions increased dramatically. Dorestad, a major trading place about 80 km from the open sea, was raided in 834 and in each of the next three years. In 835 the Isle of Sheppey was ravaged and in 836 the West Saxon army was defeated by Vikings who landed on the north coast of Somerset. In the same year Vikings began to plunder monasteries in the interior of Ireland and the monks of St Philibert abandoned Noirmoutier to seek shelter in the Loire valley.

The breach of the Frankish defences in 834 was made possible by the political crisis in Frankia that began the previous year when the emperor Louis was deposed by his sons. He was soon restored, but the eldest son, Lothar, continued to oppose his father and welcomed the support of a Viking fleet that was led by Harald, an exiled Danish king. After Louis' death in 840, Lothar rewarded Harald and secured his support in the succession dispute by granting him Walcheren and the neighbouring region.³

Scandinavians took advantage of internal conflicts elsewhere in western Europe. In 838 Vikings supported the Britons of Cornwall against the West

³ I. Wood, 'Christians and pagans in ninth-century Scandinavia', in B. and P. Sawyer and I. Wood (eds.), *The Christianization of Scandinavia* (Alingsås, 1987), pp. 36–67, at p. 43.

Saxons, and in 844 a deposed Northumbrian king was restored to power after his usurper had been defeated and killed by Viking invaders. In Ireland too there were alliances between Vikings and Irish kings, certainly from 842, and probably earlier. It was, however, Frankia that offered Vikings the most rewarding opportunities. In 841, during the war between the sons of Louis, churches and towns in the Seine valley were raided and in 842 Quentovic was sacked by a fleet that then crossed the Channel to attack Hamwic.

When the civil war ended in 843 with the division of Frankia into three kingdoms, the Vikings had discovered that monasteries and towns on navigable rivers were vulnerable and that the Franks were sometimes prepared to pay large sums for the sake of peace. In 845 an attack on Paris was prevented by the payment of 7,000 pounds of silver; for the Vikings an unprecedented tribute. It is not surprising that before long many new bands of Vikings were attracted to Frankia. A Viking fleet wintered in the Seine in 852 and a year later another did so in the Loire. By the end of the decade all the main rivers of the west Frankish kingdom were being exploited by Viking fleets. The west Frankish kingdom suffered most. The other kingdoms were not so seriously disrupted by Vikings despite the existence of many promising targets in the valleys of the Rhine and Meuse. These rivers were, in effect, protected most of the time by other Vikings who were based near their estuaries as allies of the rulers of that part of Frankia.

The Iberian peninsula also offered rich targets, but only two Viking expeditions against it are recorded in the ninth century. In 844 a fleet of fifty-four ships was repulsed from Galicia and went on to attack Seville and Lisbon before returning to Aquitaine. Fifteen years later a larger fleet, sixty-two ships, sailed into the Mediterranean after plundering Seville and Algeciras, and raided North Africa before establishing a base in Camargue from which they plundered the Rhone valley. In response to this second attack the Caliph of Cordoba strengthened the defences by building a new fleet, and no further Viking raids on Muslim Spain are reported for a hundred years.⁴

Although the main arena of Viking activity in the middle years of the century was Frankia, the British Isles continued to suffer raids. In England one of the main objectives was the estuary of the river Thames. In 851 a fleet wintered on Thanet, near its mouth, and for several years Vikings were based there or further upstream on the Isle of Sheppey. Canterbury and London were sacked and Kent was extensively plundered despite having paid tribute to secure peace.

4 R. Collins, *Early Medieval Spain* (London, 1983), pp. 195–6.

Vikings began to winter in Ireland earlier than in England, first in 840 on Lough Neagh and a year later in Dublin, one of several defended ship-enclosures that were constructed in that year. Before long there were Viking bases at Wexford, Waterford, Cork, Limerick and elsewhere, from which the surrounding areas were plundered. The booty included ornaments and elaborate caskets, but Irish monasteries were not as rich in gold, silver and gems as those in Frankia and England. Captives, who could be sold to Muslims in Spain or North Africa, were far more valuable.

The Vikings in these bases were, of course, not confined to Ireland. The Dublin Vikings launched several expeditions across the Irish Sea and in 870, after a siege of four months, captured Dumbarton, the capital of the kingdom of Strathclyde. According to the *Annals of Ulster*, the victors returned to Dublin with 'a great multitude of men, English, Britons, and Picts in captivity', a reminder of the importance of human booty. The Vikings based in Ireland were far from united and rivalry between them was complicated by the arrival of Danes in 851 to challenge the Norwegians in Dublin and elsewhere. In subsequent years Irish annalists recorded with great pleasure many battles between these invaders.

By 870 there had been profound changes in Frankia and England. In 862 Charles, king of West Frankia began systematically to defend the heart of his kingdom. He had bridges built across the Seine and Loire to hinder the passage of enemy ships, and he fortified towns and abbeys.⁵ The lower reaches of those rivers and other coastal areas were, in effect, left to the mercy of the raiders, some of whom remained in the Loire valley for many years. Most of the religious communities and many bishops in the exposed regions sought safety in other parts of Frankia.

These changes encouraged many Vikings to concentrate on England instead of Frankia. Several Viking leaders joined forces in the hope of winning status and independence by conquering the English kingdoms, of which there were then four. In 865 a fleet that landed in East Anglia was later joined by others to form what a contemporary chronicler described, with good reason, as 'a Great Army'. Five years later this army, by conquering two kingdoms, Northumbria and East Anglia, and dismembering a third, Mercia, controlled much of eastern England, from York to London. Only one kingdom, Wessex, remained intact and independent.

For several years after 870 the Viking army made determined, but unsuccessful, efforts to conquer Wessex, and between 876 and 880 its leaders began

⁵ S. Coupland, 'The fortified bridges of Charles the Bald', *Journal of Medieval History*, 17 (1991), pp. 1–12.

to grant estates to their principal followers who in turn distributed land to those of their followers who wished to settle. In the words of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 'they proceeded to plough and support themselves'. These colonists had a profound effect on dialects and place-names in the areas in which they settled; their influence on the farming vocabulary and field-names confirms that many were, indeed, farmers. The areas of densest Scandinavian settlement in the ninth century are indicated by concentrations of Scandinavian place-names, areas in which, significantly, most ornamental metalwork of the tenth and eleventh century decorated in Scandinavian styles have been found.⁶

At much the same time as members of the Great Army were settling in England, other Scandinavians, mainly Norwegians, began to colonise Iceland. The existence of this island had long been known, but it was uninhabited before the ninth century, with the possible exception that a few Irish priests or monks may have established religious communities there, as they did on other Atlantic islands. Icelanders later claimed that their ancestors emigrated in order to escape the tyranny of Harald *hárfagri* ('Finehair'), who was traditionally remembered as the first king of a united Norway. Emigration to Iceland began before Harald's time but it may have increased after Harald's victory in Hafrsfjord towards the end of the ninth century (see Chapter 8(c)).

Although a lack of reliable evidence makes it impossible to say what part earlier developments in Norway played in the movement to Iceland, Irish annals suggest that Scandinavians based in Ireland had reason to look for new homes in the second half of the ninth century. By establishing permanent bases in Ireland the Vikings lost the advantage of mobility, and disputes between different groups meant that they were unable to present a united front of the kind that proved so effective in England. They suffered many defeats. In 866 they were expelled from all their strongholds in the north and a Viking base at Youghal in the south was destroyed. Towards the end of the century the Vikings of Limerick, Waterford and Wexford all suffered defeats, and the Dublin Vikings, weakened by factional conflict, were overcome by the Irish in 902 and expelled. Some of the Dublin Vikings settled across the Irish Sea in the Wirral and possibly on the Isle of Man, but some Vikings who left Ireland at that time settled in Iceland.

Whether the colonisation was begun from the British Isles or from Norway, reports of the opportunities offered by that as yet unexploited land must have spread rapidly and tempted many to look for new homes there. After about sixty years most of the land suitable for settlement had been claimed. Later

⁶ Information generously given by Kevin Leahy of Scunthorpe Museum.

arrivals had to be content with less attractive sites, for example in the steep-sided fjords of north-west Iceland. For such people the discovery in the tenth century of apparently better sites in south-west Greenland was welcome, and towards the end of that century some began to move on, to found the most remote permanent Scandinavian settlement in which there were, eventually, some 300 farms.

According to later Icelandic sagas some of the early settlers in Greenland reached North America and discovered a fertile region they called *Vinland*, Meadow-land or Wine-land (see Chapter 8(d)). Several voyages to it are reported but the natives proved to be unfriendly and permanent settlement was not possible. Remains of buildings of this period with traces of temporary occupation by Scandinavians found at L'Anse aux Meadows near the northern tip of Newfoundland appear to have been a base camp for exploration. There is, however, no reliable evidence to show how much further south the Greenlanders went or whether they voyaged up the St Lawrence river.

The break-up of the Great Army after its failure to conquer Wessex coincided with renewed succession disputes in Frankia. Vikings were quick to take advantage of such dissension and from 879 to 891 several Viking armies were active on the Continent, occasionally combining forces. At first they concentrated on the area north of the Seine, including Flanders, where cities and monasteries had not been fortified, and in 882 there was a major incursion up the Rhine to Cologne and Trier. This led the Franks once again to protect that river by allowing a Viking army to control its estuary.

Another, more effective, response was to build fortifications. These measures had some success. In 885 the main army divided into two and each part returned to an area of earlier Viking activity, the Thames estuary and the Seine valley. After the former group had failed to take Rochester, some returned to the Continent, while others joined forces with Danes who had earlier settled in East Anglia. The Seine Vikings besieged Paris in the winter of that year. Although its defences held, the Franks were unable to prevent the invaders spending the next two winters further inland. During these campaigns huge quantities of plunder and tribute, and many captives, were taken, but the Vikings also suffered some defeats in pitched battles, in 881 at Saucourt, in 890 against the Bretons and in 891 near Louvain.

Following the defeat of 891 the army returned to England to renew the attempt to conquer the West Saxons. It failed. Alfred had learned the lesson of the campaigns in Frankia and had constructed a network of fortifications and built a fleet. In 896 the Vikings, having failed to gain even a foothold

in the areas of England not already under Scandinavian control, abandoned the attempt. In the words of the contemporary Chronicle: 'The Danish army divided, one force going into East Anglia and one into Northumbria; and those that were moneyless got themselves ships and went south across the sea to the Seine.'

Little is known about Viking activity on the Continent after that reversal. It is, however, clear that in 911 the west Frankish, or French, king granted Rouen and the surrounding territory in the lower Seine valley to a Viking leader called Rollo in the hope that he would deny other raiders the passage of the Seine, an arrangement similar to those made earlier to protect the Rhine. Another group of Vikings was allowed to settle in the neighbourhood of Nantes in 921 apparently to protect the Loire, but that only lasted sixteen years. The Viking occupation of Rouen proved permanent and was the basis of the later Duchy of Normandy, which at its full extent included the Cotentin in the west. Place- and personal names show that some of the Scandinavians who settled in the west of Normandy came from Celtic regions, probably Ireland. There are also indications that others had spent some time in England.

The other main development in the first half of the tenth century was the conquest of the Scandinavian areas in England by the descendants of Alfred who ruled Wessex and the English part of Mercia. The main resistance came from Northumbrians who tried to preserve their independence by recognising Scandinavians as kings of York. With the expulsion and death of the last of these kings, Erik Bloodaxe, an exiled Norwegian king, in 952 or 954, the English were at last permanently united in one kingdom. The earlier Scandinavian kings, none of whom ruled York for long, were all members of the dynasty that regained control of Dublin in 917. They claimed to be descendants of Ivar, the king of Dublin who, on his death in 873, was described by an Irish annalist as 'king of all the Scandinavians of Ireland and Britain'. Whatever justification there was for such a title, the fact that his descendants were so closely associated with York lends some support to the suggestion that he was one of the leaders of the Great Army that seized the city in 866.

The Scandinavians who ruled Dublin and those who retained control of other bases on the Irish coast were, during the tenth century, increasingly integrated in Irish politics, in which they played a minor role as allies of Irish kings in their struggles for supremacy. They could only hope to act independently overseas, and were probably responsible for the sporadic Viking activity that continued around the Irish Sea.

For most of the tenth century the opportunities for Vikings in west Europe were limited. The Scandinavians who had settled in the British Isles

and Normandy did not welcome newcomers, unless they had money. In Iceland the first settlers had taken the best land. The most promising targets for raids were well defended by fortifications or relatively well organised armies. Vikings could still hope to profit from hit and run raids, but few are reported until the last two decades of the century. Only large-scale invasions offered any hope of significant gains, and for most of the century no large armies operated in western Europe. One reason was probably that potential leaders were then engaged in internal conflicts in Scandinavia. In Norway there were disputes over the succession to the kingdom established by Harald Finehair, conflicts in which his son, Erik Bloodaxe, failed (Chapter 8(c)). In Denmark too there were apparently conflicts that were finally resolved by the success of Harald Bluetooth in restoring both royal power and the Danish hegemony over the lands around Skagerrak and Kattegat (see Chapter 8(b)).

The East

Reasons behind the decrease in Viking activity in western Europe may also lie in the better wealth-gathering opportunities that existed in the east where there had been great changes since the eighth century. Staraja Ladoga controlled the river Volkhov which was one of the most important routes between the Baltic and the interior of Russia. That control was made all the more effective by the rapids above the town that could only be safely navigated with the help of pilots supplied by Staraja Ladoga.

A hoard of Islamic coins deposited there in about 790 suggests that the resources of the region were by then being exported to the Caliphate. For over 200 years exports from Russia to the Muslim world, either directly across the Caspian Sea, or through markets on the rivers Don and Volga, were paid for mainly in silver coins, huge numbers of which have been found in eastern Europe. Contemporary Arab writers described the traders as *Rus*, which suggests that most of them were *Svear* from eastern Sweden. It is, therefore, not surprising that Islamic coins began to reach the Baltic region early in the ninth century.

By the middle of that century a new base had been established on an island in the Volkhov, where it flows out from Lake Ilmen, about 200 kilometres above Staraja Ladoga. This was the *Holmgård* of later Icelandic Sagas, but in Slavonic it came to be called Gorodisce (Old Town or Fort), in contrast to Novgorod (New Town or Fort) which was founded about a century later two kilometres downstream. Gorodisce, with both Slav and Scandinavian inhabitants, soon

became an important centre for the growing trade in Russian produce in both western and eastern markets.

The amount of Islamic silver reaching Russia increased dramatically in the tenth century thanks to the discovery of huge silver deposits in the Hindu Kush. This enabled the Samanid rulers of Transoxania to produce a vast quantity of coins, many of which were used to buy goods in Russia. This commerce, and the silver acquired by it, offered tempting opportunities to Vikings who found western Europe less rewarding after 900 than it had been earlier. Archaeological evidence for the presence of Scandinavians in Russia is much more abundant for the early tenth century than for the ninth, and significant numbers of Scandinavian graves have been found in the cemeteries of bases or trading places on the main rivers of the forest region, for example at Pskov, Cernigov on a tributary of the Dnepr, Bolsoe Timereven near Jaroslavl on the upper Volga, and Murom on its tributary, the Oka. The largest of these cemeteries was at Gnezdovo, on the upper Dnepr, near Smolensk, with 3,000 or more graves of the late ninth to the early eleventh century, some of which were certainly those of men and women of Scandinavian descent, including boat burials of people of high status.

However, this archaeological evidence appears to reflect a process of peaceful colonisation rather than violent tribute-taking or plundering. The burial rituals suggest that a significant number of Scandinavian men, women and children, mostly *Svear*, began to settle along with people from other cultures, Slavs, Finns and Balts, and that together they exploited this vast and sparsely populated region. As a result a distinct, blended culture evolved.⁷

The most significant extension of Scandinavian activity was to Kiev on the middle Dnepr, which was by the end of the ninth century ruled by a dynasty of Scandinavian descent. Initially they paid tribute to the Khazars, a Turkish people who occupied the valleys of the lower Don and Volga and from the seventh to the early tenth century had hegemony over a huge empire between the Caspian and Black Seas. Although the rulers of Kiev, and many of their leading followers, were of Scandinavian descent, by the end of the century they had been Slavicised. This change is clearly reflected in the rulers' names. The prince of Kiev from about 913 to 945 was Igor and his wife was Olga, names derived from the Scandinavian Ingvar and Helga, but his son, prince from 964 to 971, was named Svjatoslav. Nevertheless, they and their successors continued

7 I. Jansson, 'Warfare, trade or colonisation? Some general remarks on the eastern expansion of the Scandinavians in the Viking period', in P. Hansson (ed.), *The Rural Viking in Russia and Sweden* (Örebro, 1997), pp. 9–64.

to be considered *Rus*, a term that was by then no longer used specifically for Scandinavians.

Early in the tenth century coin hoards in Scandinavia show that many Samanid coins were by then reaching the Baltic region. It has been generally supposed that they reflect a favourable balance of trade, although it is not clear what was bought with them. The fact that for some twenty years after about 965 very few Islamic coins were imported into Scandinavia although they continued to reach Russia, if in smaller quantities than before, suggests that in the first half of the century much of the silver reaching Scandinavia was acquired in ways that were not possible later. The most satisfactory explanation is that much of it was gathered by trade or as tribute or plunder in eastern Europe by bands of Scandinavians operating independently, and that the decline in silver imports reflects the success of *Rus* princes in resisting such incursions. If so, that success was partly due to the Scandinavian warriors, called *varjagi* in Slavonic (ON *væringar*, Varangians in modern English) who were recruited by *Rus* princes in the tenth century.

According to later Kievan tradition, Svjatoslav's son, Vladimir, prince from 978 to 1015, early in his reign reduced his retinue of *varjagi* by sending many of them to the Byzantine Empire. This is confirmed by Byzantine evidence that a large force of warriors, later called *varaggoi*, was sent by Vladimir in 988 and enabled the emperor to crush a serious rebellion. Thereafter Varangians, Slavs as well as Scandinavians, played an important role in the Byzantine army, and later formed the imperial bodyguard, the Varangian Guard. One of the most famous members of this élite force was Harald *harðráði* ('Hard-ruler') before he became king of Norway in 1046.

The conquests of England

Increasingly effective opposition in the east may well have been a factor in the renewal of Viking raids in western Europe towards the end of the tenth century. A further incentive for Scandinavians to seek profitable exile as Vikings was the revival of Danish power under Harald Bluetooth and his son Sven Forkbeard. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the two main periods of Viking activity in western Europe began, towards the end of the eighth and the tenth centuries, when Danish kings were extending their authority in neighbouring parts of Scandinavia.

Raids on England reported in the 980s may have been the work of Vikings from Ireland, but ten years later fleets from Scandinavia began once again to threaten western Europe. Many places along the coast of the continent, from

the Elbe to northern Spain, were attacked, but the main target was England, which was then a rich kingdom with large and expanding towns and a great quantity of silver in circulation in the form of coins of high quality. Vikings soon discovered that the English under their king Æthelred were able and willing to pay large sums for the sake of peace, however temporary.

There is little doubt that the first major raid on England, in 991, was led by Sven Forkbeard.⁸ Whether or not he was aware that in the ninth century the power of Danish kings had been undermined by returning Vikings, he took good care to ensure that he as well as potential rivals profited from Viking expeditions. In 991 the English paid £10,000 and three years later a fleet that was certainly led by Sven extorted £16,000. He was also the leader of raids in 1003 and 1004, and although he is not named, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle implies that it was his army that returned in 1006 and forced the English to pay £36,000.

Other armies besides Sven's attacked England in Æthelred's reign. A runic inscription in Uppland commemorating Ulf of Borresta records that he took gelds in England from three leaders; Tostig, Thorkell and Knut. Tostig is not mentioned in English sources but Thorkell is named in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as the leader of an immense army that landed in Kent in August 1009. It stayed until 1012 when it was bought off by a tribute of £48,000. Some of the fleet then dispersed, but Thorkell, with 45 ships, remained to defend England. Thorkell was no friend of Sven Forkbeard and the king had reason to fear that, strengthened by this success and with English support, he might pose a serious threat to his power. Sven's decision to conquer England in the next year seems to have been partly intended to prevent such a challenge; he may even have suspected that Thorkell hoped to conquer England himself.

Sven's campaign of conquest began in the summer of 1013 and was finished at Christmas when he was acknowledged as king. His triumph was short-lived; he died six weeks later. The English recalled Æthelred from exile in Normandy but Sven's son Knut returned in 1015 to regain what his father had won. By the end of the following year he was recognised as king by the English, and later also by the Danes and Norwegians. The Danish conquest did not put an end to Viking attacks on England, but the fleet that Knut maintained proved to be an effective deterrent. No attacks are reported after 1018 when the crews of thirty pirate ships were killed by Knut's forces.

Knut died in 1035 and was succeeded in turn by two sons. After both were dead, in 1042 the English chose Æthelred's surviving son, Edward, as king.

⁸ P. Sawyer, 'The Scandinavian background', in J. Cooper (ed.), *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, pp. 33–42.

Nevertheless, several later kings of the Danes and of the Norwegians believed that they had a claim to England. Many Scandinavians were willing to encourage such ambitions and hoped at least to have the opportunity to gather some of England's wealth as plunder even if conquest was not possible.

When Edward died childless in January 1066, his successor, Harold Godwinson, was challenged by the Norwegian king, Harald Hard-ruler. He invaded England but was killed in a battle at Stamford Bridge, near York, on 25 September. Three weeks later Harold Godwinson was himself killed in a battle near Hastings against William, Duke of Normandy, who was crowned king of the English on Christmas Day. It was, however, several years before he had firm control of the whole kingdom, and English magnates who were unwilling to accept him were prepared to support the claim of the Danish king, Sven Estridsen. He arrived in the Humber in 1070 but William's vigorous defensive measures were effective and Sven withdrew in the summer, although he and his men were able to keep some of their booty.

Five years later a Danish fleet, led by one of Sven's sons, Knut, intended to support a rebellion against William but it had been crushed before they arrived. The Danes returned home after plundering York and its neighbourhood. In 1085, when Knut was king of the Danes, he planned to conquer England, a threat that William took very seriously, but the assembled fleet never sailed. There were a few later expeditions by Norwegian kings to the Northern and Western Isles but England never again suffered a large-scale attack by Scandinavians. The Viking Age was definitely over.

One of the most significant developments in these centuries was the huge extension of the Scandinavian world by Norwegian colonists. The descendants of Scandinavians who settled in England, Ireland, Normandy or Russia were quickly assimilated, but in the previously uninhabited Atlantic islands – Føroyar, Iceland and Greenland – Norwegian colonists and their descendants continued to speak their own language and maintained links with Norway. So too did those who settled in Orkney, Shetland, the Hebrides and the Isle of Man. The closeness of the links between Norway and these colonies was clearly demonstrated by their inclusion in the archiepiscopal province of Nidaros when it was established in the middle of the twelfth century.

In Scandinavia itself there were many changes in the Viking Age, the most fundamental being the conversion to Christianity, which will be discussed later. Missionaries, and later bishops in regular sees, not only preached a new religion, they also brought knowledge of more developed forms of government and opened new channels of communication with other parts of Europe. Links were also forged by traders. The increasing scale and range of commerce across

the North Sea and the Baltic to meet the demands of the expanding towns of western Europe for food and raw materials created many new opportunities for contacts and new influences. One result of this expanding commerce was the development of towns on new sites as well as in such well-established trading places as Ribe. This process was encouraged, and was indeed to a large extent made possible, by kings who could provide the protection that traders and craftsmen needed and who, in return, gained great benefits. Towns were not only centres of secular authority, supervised by royal agents, they were also places in which cathedrals or major churches, founded and endowed by kings, were imposing symbols of the new, Christian kingship.

Viking culture

ELSE ROESDAHL AND PREBEN MEULENGRACHT SØRENSEN

Almost everything we know about the culture (and technology) of the Viking Age derives from archaeological and textual evidence. The archaeological evidence, constantly growing and with a range of important finds now precisely dated by dendrochronology, is contemporary with the period. The textual evidence, on the other hand, was – apart from runic inscriptions – usually written down long after the Viking Age; therefore the reliability of much of it is still a matter of debate. However, new attitudes and new questions have provided new perspectives on and insights into the textual evidence.

The culture of the Viking Age was strong, independent, rich in tradition and vibrant. It was good at copying, adapting, developing and creating – and foreign ideas could be incorporated or rejected. The many points of contact meant that well-informed and well-travelled Scandinavians were familiar with a variety of nationalities, environments and cultures. Their tolerance of other cultures was presumably an important factor in the Scandinavians' astonishing ability to establish themselves as traders, conquerors or colonists in new countries.

Regions and communications

The lands of Viking Age Scandinavia,¹ apart from Finland and the Sami areas in their northern and central parts, shared a substantially common culture. This arose from their situation furthest north in Europe and the fact that this sparsely populated territory was almost completely surrounded by water, so that its regions could be linked by seaborne traffic. The varied natural resources of Scandinavia encouraged shipping and trade; almost all necessities could be found somewhere in the region: cattle, grain, fish, wool, iron, timber,

¹ This chapter has been translated by Judith Jesch.

¹ E. Roesdahl, *The Vikings* (London, 1992, 2nd rev. edn 1998), pp. 25–9, 78–93; E. Roesdahl and D. M. Wilson (eds.), *From Viking to Crusader: Scandinavia and Europe 800–1200* (Copenhagen and New York, 1992), pp. 24–51; J. Graham-Campbell (ed.), *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World* (London, 1994), pp. 12–21, 73–7.

furs, etc. Much of this could also be exported. Thus, the ship was a decisive factor not only in the growth of Viking Age trade but also in the more general expansion and common culture of the period (Plate 3). Along the routes served by ships Scandinavian culture influenced, for example, the coastal areas of south-western Finland, the gateway to Russia. There were, however, also important inland routes along roads and across fords, with some bridges in the late Viking Age. Other communication routes, using sledges (Plate 5), skis, snowshoes or skates, developed where there was a stable snow and ice cover for several months of the year, as in the mountains, or in the lake areas of central Sweden.

The great distances and the geographical diversity of Scandinavia also meant that economic activity, settlement patterns and opportunities for contact could vary dramatically from one district to another, and that cultural conditions could therefore also vary. Thus, the individual gods were not equally revered everywhere, and not all personal names were used throughout the region. Another factor in cultural variation was Scandinavia's threefold outward orientation. For maritime traffic, Denmark is a natural gateway between western Europe and the Baltic. Like south-west Sweden, it faces south and west: towards the Slavonic areas south of the Baltic, towards Germany and the coasts of western Europe, and towards England. Present-day Norway and Sweden lie back-to-back, separated by large areas of forest and wilderness. Most of Norway faces west and south: towards the North Atlantic islands, the British Isles and the coasts of western Europe, although Trøndelag and northern Norway also had good overland connections to the east. Large parts of Sweden face directly east: towards the Baltic, Finland and Russia. Viking expeditions, trading voyages and emigration from Denmark, Norway and Sweden went mainly in these respective directions. The geographical survey prefacing the Old English translation of *Orosius*, commissioned by King Alfred (c. 890), tells of the Norwegian chieftain Ohthere (Ottar), who lived and farmed 'northern-most of all Northmen' (Norwegians), probably somewhere in south Troms, but who also received significant payments from the Sami and went on expeditions to the White Sea in search of valuable walrus tusks and walrus hide ropes, making contact with the population there. He later went on a trading voyage to Hedeby in southern Denmark as well as to England, where he was the guest of King Alfred.²

In the archaeological material, the various regions' individual areas of contact can be seen clearly in their imported goods. There are many continental

2 N. Lund (ed.), *Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred: The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan* (York, 1984).

objects in Denmark, many ornamental metal mounts from the British Isles in west Norwegian graves, a number of Finnish objects particularly in eastern Sweden, and many clothes displaying eastern inspiration (most likely the principality of Kiev) in the graves of Birka.³ But along with these various points of contact came influences which, in adapted form, became a part of either the regional or common Scandinavian culture. Thus, western Scandinavia and the Scandinavian parts of the British Isles saw the development of a fashion for ostentatious penannular brooches, their shape inspired by large Irish and Scottish clothes-fasteners, used by men to fasten their cloaks and as status symbols. Their shape and size could be almost grotesque, like the brooch from Newbiggin in Cumbria which weighs about 0.75 kg and has a sharp pin over 0.5 m long: sensible people wore these with the pin pointing upwards (Plate 1). The common Scandinavian culture included another new fashion of trefoil brooches used by women to fasten their shawls and cloaks (Plate 2). These were inspired by trefoil Frankish sword-belt mounts and became a fashion in the early Viking Age.⁴

Ships

Sailing ships are a prerequisite of the Viking Age.⁵ It is a matter of some dispute when the sail was first introduced in Scandinavia, but it was probably not until the eighth century that the large Scandinavian rowing vessels of the preceding period were developed to take sail, which had then been known in southern and western Europe for centuries. The 21.4 m long ship from the Oseberg grave near Oslofjord was built around 820 and is the oldest known example of such a combined rowing and sailing vessel, a 'viking ship'. A number of ship finds from both aristocratic graves and the sea-bed enable us to study their construction, and experiments in sailing the many

3 E. Wamers, *Insularer Metallschmuck in wikingerzeitlichen Gräbern Nordeuropas: Untersuchungen zur skandinavischen Westexpansion* (Offa-Bücher 56, Neumünster, 1985); I. Hägg, *Die Tracht*, in G. Arwidsson (ed.), *Birka*, II:2 (Stockholm, 1996); Roesdahl and Wilson, *From Viking to Crusader*, cat. nos. 119–35.

4 J. Graham-Campbell, *Viking Artefacts: A Select Catalogue* (London, 1980), cat. nos. 194–8, 327–8; Roesdahl and Wilson, *From Viking to Crusader*, cat. nos. 135–41, 364.

5 A. W. Brøgger and H. Shetelig, *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution* (Oslo, 1951); O. Olsen and O. Crumlin-Pedersen, *Five Viking Ships from Roskilde Fjord* (København, 1978); O. Crumlin-Pedersen, 'Aspects of Viking-Age shipbuilding in the light of the construction and trials of the Skuldelev ship-replicas Saga Siglar and Roar Ege', *Journal of Danish Archaeology*, 5 (1986), pp. 209–28; O. Crumlin-Pedersen, 'Ship types and sizes AD 800–1200', in O. Crumlin-Pedersen (ed.), *Aspects of Maritime Scandinavia AD 200–1200* (Roskilde, 1991), pp. 69–82; O. Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking Age Ships and Shipbuilding in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig* (Schlewig and Roskilde, 1997).

reconstructions of excavated ships enable us to judge their sailing abilities. The most important finds, apart from that at Oseberg, are the 23.3 m long Gokstad ship (Plate 3), built around 880, from a chieftain's grave not far from Oseberg; the ships from the harbour at Hedeby; and the five very different ships from the first half of the eleventh century which were later deliberately sunk off Skuldelev in Roskilde Fjord in Denmark, to stop enemy access to the town of Roskilde (Figure 1). The Oseberg and the Gokstad ships had room for 30 and 32 oarsmen respectively, but the 64 shields in the latter ship suggest that there might have been twice this number, allowing the oarsmen to row in shifts.

The Scandinavian ship types were developed to a high degree of perfection, with sailing characteristics very advanced for that time, as can also be deduced from both western European written sources and Scandinavian skaldic poems. Although there were regional variations, and a range of sizes and ship types, the Scandinavian ships had in common a clinker-built hull (constructed of overlapping planks), a shallow keel and tapering prow and stern. The lines between prow and stern, and between keel and gunwhale, curve gently. The planked shell of the hull is strengthened inside by a number of symmetrical ribs across its width, resting on the keel, and also by crossbeams. The ship was steered using an oar placed near the stern on the starboard side, and the sail was square. In general, the aim was to build ships which were light, strong and supple all at once. This was achieved by choosing timber of the smallest possible dimensions and using elastic joints; as far as possible, wood was used in which the direction of the fibres corresponded to the shape of the finished piece. Most of the ships reveal outstanding craftsmanship, but there was a great difference in the workmanship and attention to detail between, say, a chieftain's own ship, and a trading ship or fishing boat.

During the Viking Age ships became specialised into two main groups: warships (also for travel) and cargo ships. The first group includes two of the Skuldelev ships (nos. 2 and 5). Such ships were generally built of oak and had oar-holes the length of the ship and a mast that could be lowered. Thus they were designed to be propelled by oars or sail, making them particularly manoeuvrable: they could be used to sail the sea or rivers, could go under bridges and cope with difficult winds and currents. On the outside of the topmost plank a special rail allowed shields to be placed along the gunwhale. These ships were also low and narrow in proportion to their length, as for instance the two Skuldelev ships and an especially attractively made ship from the harbour in Hedeby. One of the Skuldelev ships (no. 2) was a seagoing warship, about 30 m long and with room for 40–50 oarsmen; dendrochronological analysis of the timber

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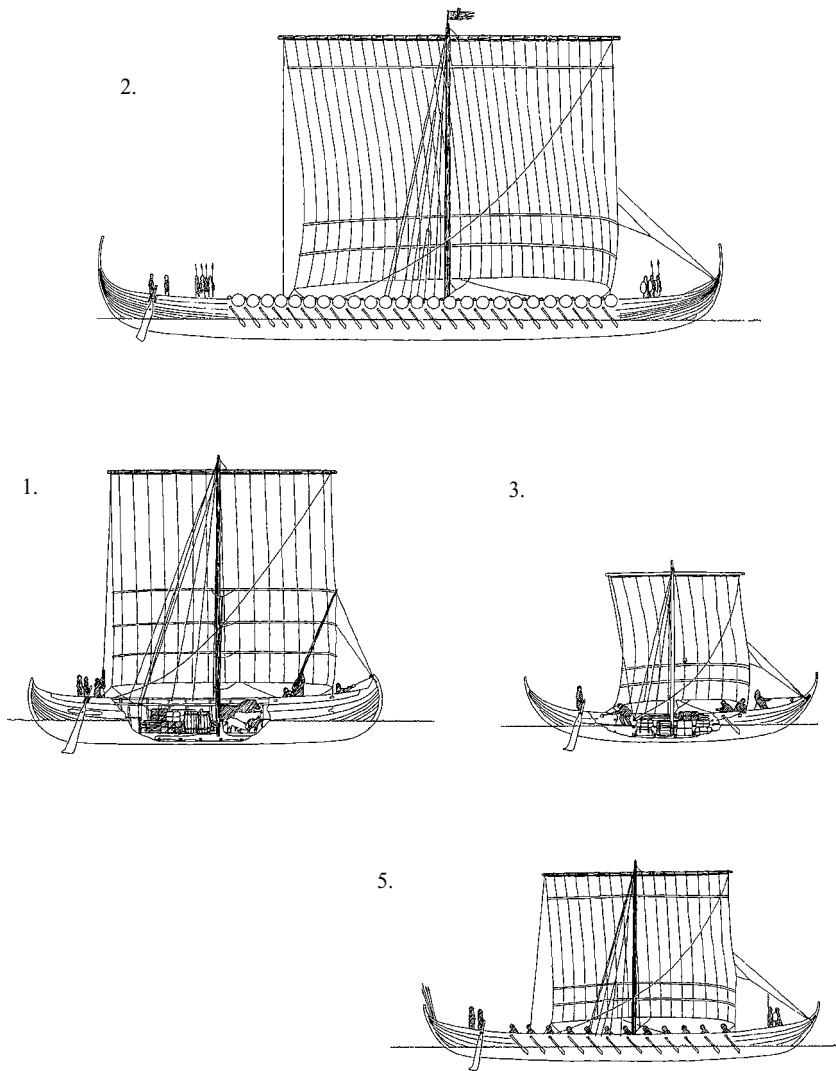


Figure 1 Four eleventh-century ships from Skuldelev, Denmark: two warships (above and below, nos. 2 and 5) and two cargo ships (centre, nos. 1 and 3). Reconstructions drawn at the same scale. Six vessels were originally believed to lie beneath the water at Skuldelev, but during excavation ship no. 4 was found to be part of the much larger ship no. 2. Ship no. 6 is not shown.

shows it was built in the Dublin area in 1042 and repaired some twenty years later.

The oldest known examples of specialised cargo ships are from the late tenth century or around 1000.⁶ This group includes ships from Klåstad in the Oslofjord, Äskekärr near Göteborg, Hedeby harbour and Skuldelev. They were high and broad in relation to their length and had a half-deck fore and aft, so that there was an open space for cargo amidships. The mast could not easily be lowered and there were only a few oar-holes, indicating that they were rowed only in narrow channels or in certain manoeuvres. Cargo ships were sailing ships and the type was first identified in the Skuldelev ships (nos. 1 and 3) excavated in 1962. Skuldelev 1 was a capacious seagoing ship, 16.5 m long and built of pine in western Norway. Skuldelev 3 was about 14 m long and constructed of oak, probably locally, for sailing in Danish waters and the Baltic. Their cargo capacity was c. 24 and 4.6 metric tons respectively, while the Hedeby ship is thought to have been capable of carrying around 60 tons. Such specialised cargo ships imply a widespread trade in heavy and high volume goods, which were for daily use rather than luxuries. Here, ship archaeology supports other archaeological research, making important contributions to the history of trade.

Trading voyages on rivers, however, required efficiently rowed ships. Moreover, in many places, such as Russia, they needed to be dragged overland for short distances, and so could not be too heavy. It is likely that small ships or local boat types were used for such journeys.⁷

Economy and physical constraints

As elsewhere in Europe, agriculture in various forms was the predominant economic activity.⁸ But with the growth of trade, both locally and abroad, the Viking Age saw the emergence of town-like settlements in Scandinavia (though not in Iceland) and trade and crafts became increasingly specialist occupations. Society was characterised by great social differences and was divided into three main groups: the unfree (slaves), the free and the aristocracy. There was further

6 E. Roesdahl, 'Dendrochronology and Viking studies in Denmark', in B. Ambrosiani and H. Clarke (eds.), *The Twelfth Viking Congress (Birka Studies 3, Stockholm, 1994)*, pp. 106–16; Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking Age Ships*, pp. 108–111, 199–203 and *passim*.

7 O. Crumlin-Pedersen, 'Schiffe und Schifffahrtswege im Ostseeraum während des 9.–12. Jahrhunderts', *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission*, 69 (1988), pp. 530–63.

8 E. Roesdahl, *Viking Age Denmark* (London, 1982), pp. 51–67, 110–33; Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, pp. 41–5, 94–107; Roesdahl and Wilson, *From Viking to Crusader*, 126–41; Graham-Campbell, *Cultural Atlas*, 58–73 and *passim*.

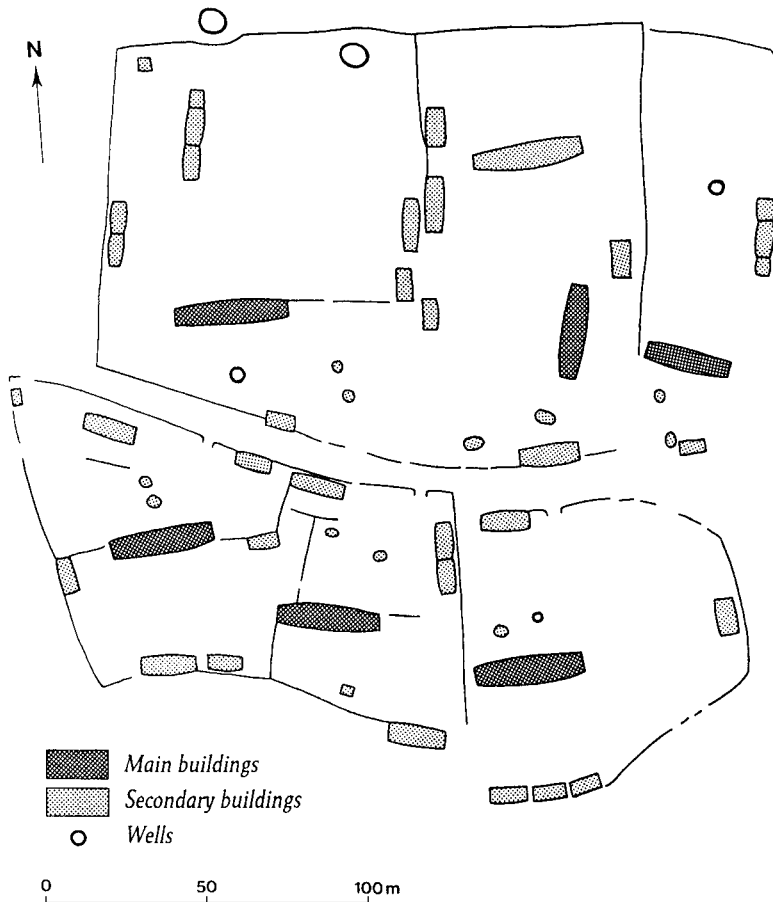


Figure 2 Plan of Vorbasse village in Jylland, Denmark, c. 900. Six fenced farms with gates opening onto a central track or street.

differentiation within each group, for instance between landless free men and great landowners, or between professional warriors and craftsmen.

Almost everyone lived on a farm, though many as servants or slaves. In Denmark, farms were often grouped in villages, while individual farms were common throughout much of Norway and Sweden. Excavations have shown that a farm normally consisted of a collection of buildings divided from their surroundings by an enclosure or fence. A whole village has been excavated at Vorbasse in Jylland (Figure 2) (cf. Chapter 3). It had six or seven farms, which were placed on either side of, and each with a gate to, the street. Here, each

farm consisted of a main building about 30 m long, placed more or less centrally in the farmyard, with most of the rest of the buildings along the enclosure, and a few scattered across the yard. The main building had living quarters in one end and a byre in the other, with room for 20–30 animals, presumably cattle (as suggested by traces of stall dividers).⁹ The oldest towns in Scandinavia are Ribe and Hedeby in Denmark and Birka in eastern Sweden, all founded in the eighth century or around 800, probably by kings, just as many later towns were. Town houses had some functions that differed from those in the country and were adapted to these needs.

Buildings¹⁰ were mainly of wood, with which most of Scandinavia was well supplied, but some had walls of wattle and daub, and in northern Scandinavia and Iceland the walls were often insulated with outer walls of turf. The few stone buildings known from the Viking Age are the remains of churches from the very end of the period. Dwelling houses had plenty of storage space. A hearth or oven, sometimes both, served for heating and cooking. Entrance doors were normally simple but could be decorated with carvings or iron fittings, and door locks were common. Keys and locks were usually simple – their most important function was to mark ownership. Later written sources suggest that theft from a locked area was viewed as a particularly serious crime and punished accordingly. The keyholder, usually the mistress of the farm, therefore had a special responsibility and status.

Inside, houses were often divided into several rooms (Plate 4). Light was provided by small window-holes, the hearth or smoke-holes in the roof; oil lamps and tallow candles could be used for extra light. The walls of more elegant houses could be decorated with carved panels, as described in the early tenth-century skaldic poem *Húsdrápa*; some surviving carved panels from Flataung in Iceland are from an eleventh-century church. For special occasions, the walls were also decorated with figured tapestries running horizontally around the room; some fragments survive, especially from the Oseberg grave. Many dwellings had low, broad platforms along the walls, where people sat or lay, protected from draughts and cold feet. The most important items, apart from kitchen utensils, were a loom, textiles and furs, small stools, and lockable chests and boxes. Other furniture was rare and restricted to the

⁹ See also S. Hvass, 'Wikingerzeitliche Siedlungen in Vorbasse', *Offa*, 41 (1984), pp. 97–112.

¹⁰ See notes 8–9; G. Ólafsson (ed.), *Hús, gård och bebyggelse* (Reykjavík, 1983); K. Schietzel, 'Die Baubefunde in Haithabu', in H. Jahnkuhn et al. (eds), *Archäologische und naturwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen an Siedlungen im deutschen Küstengebiet*, 2 (Bonn, 1984), pp. 135–58; H. Schmidt, *Building Customs in Viking Age Denmark* (Herning, 1994).

upper classes. The surviving examples are mainly from richly furnished graves: chairs and beds, and a little washstand. Furniture could be painted, or decorated in other ways. Thus, the beds from the Oseberg and Gokstad graves have bedposts carved with large animal heads, and the remains of chests found in Trondheim and elsewhere have their surfaces adorned with elegantly carved animal ornaments.¹¹

The physical framework of life and death was determined by social status and wealth. In the Oseberg grave,¹² a high-ranking woman, possibly a queen, was buried in 834 in her ship covered by a large mound. The conditions of preservation were uniquely good, and her grave goods give a fascinating impression of what a royal or aristocratic household at that time would contain in the way of furniture (beds, chair and chests), kitchen- and tableware, tools for working fine textiles, conveyances (wagon, sledges and the ship itself), and a lot more besides (Plates 5 and 6). Wood was widely used, some of it richly decorated, showing that wood was one of the most important materials for both utilitarian objects of every description and for artistic expression.

Religion

The religion of the Viking Age was polytheistic. A multitude of gods and powers influenced the different aspects of life. Religion was woven into life and culture, and not, like Christianity, administered by priests and carried out in special buildings. There was no sharp division between the secular and the religious; religious notions were linked to every aspect of life and all action was religious action. Religion was also intimately associated with secular power as farmers, chieftains and kings were also religious leaders. The gods participated in all aspects of life, and they had to be invoked on all occasions, so that both women and men were cult leaders.¹³

¹¹ See note 8; A. W. Brøgger et al. (eds.), *Osebergfundet*, 2 (Oslo, 1928); Graham-Campbell, *Viking Artefacts*, cat. nos. 24–90, 453–4; H. Elsner, *Wikinger Museum Haithabu: Schaufenster einer frühen Stadt* (Neumünster, 1989).

¹² A. W. Brøgger et al. (eds.), *Osebergfundet*, 1–3, 5 (Kristiania–Oslo, 1917–28); A. E. Christensen, A. S. Ingstad and B. Myhre, *Osebergdronningens grav* (Oslo, 1992).

¹³ For an introduction to Old Norse religion, see P. A. Munch, *Norse Mythology: Legends of Gods and Heroes* (New York, 1954); J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 1–2 (Berlin, 1956–7, 2nd edn); E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (Westport, 1975, 2nd edn); F. Ström, *Nordisk hedendom: Tro och sed i förkristen tid* (Göteborg, 1985, 2nd edn); G. Steinsland and P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Menneske og makter i vikingenes verden* (Oslo, 1994); M. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myth in Medieval Icelandic Society*, 1: *The Myths* (Odense, 1994).

Place-names, runic inscriptions and stone carvings are authentic witnesses to the veneration of gods in the Viking Age. The male gods – Thor, Odin, Freyr, Njord, Baldr, Heimdal and others – were venerated all over Scandinavia, and each had, as far as we can tell, his own main function. Thor was the god of farmers, protecting humans against the giants and ensuring the fertility of the land. Odin was a much more complex deity, the god of warriors, poets and the aristocracy. He represented wisdom, magic and the art of words, but also death, ecstasy and treachery. Odin had no morals and, while Thor defended the world of gods and men against the forces of chaos, Odin crossed the boundaries to meet them. His mysterious character, more than any other god, inspired the blossoming of the Norse view of the world in literature and myth.

There are two families of gods in the mythology, the *æsir*, including Odin and Thor, and the *vanir*, including Njord, and his son Freyr and daughter Freyja. Njord was associated with the sea and fishing, and Freyr was the god of human lust and fertility (Plate 7). Freyja is the only one of the Norse goddesses who seems individualised to us. Like her brother, she was associated with sexuality and fertility, and according to the mythological poem *Grímnismál* she had her own realm in the world of the dead, where she welcomed half of those who fell in battle.

The other goddesses appear in mythology mainly as groups. The Norns are goddesses of fate who demarcate each person's life-span. The Valkyries are Odin's maidservants, who in times of war choose those men who will die and ride to Valhall, Odin's realm of the dead. Tenth-century graves, with the dead man buried with his weapons and his horse, are perhaps evidence of this belief¹⁴ (Plate 8). According to the myths, the dead warriors will fight together with the gods in their last battle against the forces of chaos at *Ragnarøk* 'the doom of the gods'. The mythology has little to say about the *disir*, but we know that they were female powers, and skaldic poetry tells us that sacrifices were made to them on farms.

The congregation was wherever people were gathered together: on the farm, in the village or at the king's court. On the farms, cult activities were led by the farmer and his wife, at the court by the king and queen. Humans and gods had a relationship based on reciprocity, a kind of friendship in which people held a *blót* (sacrificial feast) for the gods in return for their help. The

14 M. Müller-Wille, 'Frühmittelalterliche Prunkgräber im südlichen Skandinavien', *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 178 (1978), pp. 633–52; E. Roesdahl, 'Fra vikingegrav til Valhal', in T. Kisbye and E. Roesdahl (eds.), *Beretning fra andet tværfaglige vikingesymposium* (Højbjerg, 1983), pp. 39–49.

feasts were held in the autumn, at the solstices, and in the spring. According to later literary sources, animals were sacrificed, and ale was drunk with a toast for *gott ár ok friðr*, 'a good year and peace'. Excavations at Viking Age farms, for example the chieftain's farm at Borg in Lofoten in northern Norway, show that large cooking-pits were used in the hall, and it is likely that these were employed for religious festivals.¹⁵

Myths and world view

Norse myths are preserved in medieval copies of Eddic poems and in prose form in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, and some of them are confirmed by stone carvings from the Viking Age. Our understanding of the mythology is strongly influenced by Snorri's comprehensive vision in his *Edda* (see also Chapter 15).¹⁶ This is the attempt of a learned medieval author to comprehend the logic of, and to explain systematically, a world which was mythical and so not logical, and therefore fundamentally different from our modes of thought. The myths encode an understanding of the world and an attitude to life which is fundamentally different from the Christian one, and this increases our confidence in them. In the middle of the world was *Miðgarðr*, the human world, and outside this was *Útgarðr*, where the giants and the forces of chaos had their home. Furthest out, in the sea, lay the Midgard serpent, a great sea monster, encircling all creation (Plate 9). In this world view there is no fixed centre: the middle and *Miðgarðr* are wherever humans live. In the middle of the mythic world stood the world-tree *Yggdrasill* and, in human reality, this manifested itself in the farmyard tree, marking the centre of the life of farm and family.

The duality of the pre-Christian world view can be seen in the relationship between the gods and the giants, which is both antagonistic and inter-dependent. The first living creature was the primeval giant Ymir. The gods, themselves of giant race on their mothers' side, killed him and created the world from his body. In this way, they made the cosmos out of the matter of chaos. The cosmos is constantly threatened by the giants, but the gods were also dependent on them, because they had the wisdom and the skills which the gods needed. In *Ragnarøk*, the gods will battle against the forces of chaos and die. The world will be destroyed, but a new one will arise.

¹⁵ G. Stamsø Munch, 'Hus og hall: En høvdinggård på Borg i Lofoten', in G. Steinsland et al. (eds.), *Nordisk hedendom: Et symposium* (Odense, 1991), pp. 321–33.

¹⁶ Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* is published in English translation by A. Faulkes in *Snorri Sturluson: Edda* (London, 1987).

Morality

The morality of the Viking Age was no more a fixed doctrine, telling people how to behave, than its religion. The key concepts were freedom and honour.¹⁷ All men and women were free, unless they were slaves and thus considered the property of others with no right of self-determination. However, free status did not mean the freedom to do as one wished. It meant self-determination and inviolability within limits established by the community. The free person had honour – respect in the eyes of others and himself – and his honour protected him from encroachment by others, which is why it was so important. Society had little or no centralised power; a man had to defend himself and his family, or at least demonstrate that he was capable of doing so. In this way he also obtained the support of others, as honour was not a personal matter; the individual possessed it together with his group: his family, his household or his assembly group. The failure of one individual would bring shame on the whole group. Anyone harmed by strangers would be supported in his revenge by his group.

Blood vengeance, i.e. killing, was the answer to all kinds of injuries, from killing, rape and wounding down to what we would consider insignificant blows. However, revenge was not essentially a personal response. It could fall on someone who had had nothing to do with the injury, but who was related to the culprit. The idea was to hurt the opponent's group and restore the balance. Vengeance was a duty and anyone not taking revenge lost his honour, with serious consequences for his social status.

Vengeance, like the concept of honour, maintained the peace, as even the possibility of blood vengeance was a guarantee against violence and other offences. Although there were great social differences, and power was unevenly distributed, death was the same for all, and all could take revenge.

Runes

Scandinavia got its own script – runes – in the first or second century AD.¹⁸ The origins of this writing system are debated, but it is clear that it is related to alphabets that already existed in the Mediterranean area, especially the

¹⁷ On the ethics of the Viking Age, see V. Grønbech, *The Culture of the Teutons*, 1–3 (Copenhagen and London, 1931). On ethic values as presented in the sagas of Icelanders, see P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaerne* (Oslo, 1995, 2nd edn).

¹⁸ Handbooks on Scandinavian runes include E. Moltke, *Runes and their Origin: Denmark and elsewhere* (Copenhagen, 1985); S. F. B. Jansson, *Runes in Sweden* (Stockholm, 1987).

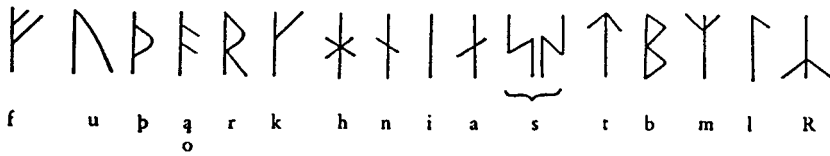


Figure 3 Viking Age Scandinavian runic characters: so-called 'normal' or 'Danish' or 'long-twig' runes.

Roman. However, the runic alphabet is an independent creation of a Scandinavian or North Germanic culture of which we know very little. The oldest surviving inscriptions are found on jewellery, weapons and other implements. Usually these consist of only one or two words, a name or possibly a religious formula.

The runic 'alphabet' is called *fupark* after its first six characters (Figure 3). There were originally twenty-four characters but during the eighth century these were reduced to sixteen. This innovation must have been the result of a centrally coordinated initiative to renew a writing system which had become out-of-date in relation to linguistic developments. This systematic and planned simplification proved its usefulness in the succeeding centuries and the reform shows that there was an active interest in script in Viking Age Scandinavia; however, writing played quite a different role from that which it was to play later when the Roman alphabet was adopted. In theory, runic characters could be used just like Roman ones (e.g. for longer texts), but as they were not used in this way, we have to conclude that the Vikings saw no reason to do so. It is likely that runes were used for short messages and letters, but they were not viewed only as a means of communication, for they could also link objects and monuments to concepts, myths and narratives.

The custom of erecting rune stones to commemorate the dead arose in the Viking Age. In this way, memories could be preserved in what was otherwise an exclusively oral culture. The names of the survivors, those who raised the stone, were just as prominent in the inscription. The runic inscriptions marked a change in the generations and possibly inheritance. Sometimes, the rune carver was also named (and this could be a survival from the days when the runes themselves had meaning). An example is the longest Danish rune stone inscription at Glavendrup on Fyn, commissioned around 900 by Ragnhild for her dead husband, Alle. He is called the *goði* (cult leader) of the Sølver, and the honourable *þegn* (captain?) of the *via-lið* (a group of warriors?). Alle's sons are also mentioned, but not by name, and it says that 'Sote carved these runes in memory of his lord'. Then follows an invocation to the

god: 'Thor hallow these runes'. Finally, there is a curse on anyone who destroys or moves the stone. Such a monument was clearly pregnant with religious and social meaning.

Most rune stones were raised after the introduction of Christianity and, in Sweden especially, there are large numbers of inscriptions invoking the Christian God (see Chapter 7). One of the most attractive Christian memorials was raised in Norway during the eleventh century at Dynna in Hadeland. A mother had a bridge built for the soul of her dead daughter, and erected a stone with this inscription: 'Gunvor, Thrydrik's daughter, had a bridge built in memory of Astrid, her daughter. She was the most skilful girl in Hadeland.' The slender 2.82 m high stone is decorated with Christian pictures: at the top, the Christ child stands on the star above Bethlehem; the Three Wise Men ride in the middle; and, below, two of them give gifts to the Virgin Mary in the stable with the manger in the middle (Plate 10).

There is nothing to suggest that Viking Age poetry was written down in runes: its essential characteristic was orality. However, some inscriptions have metrical form. There are examples of memorial inscriptions using *fornyrðislag* ('old lore metre'), and one inscription, the Karlevi stone on Öland in the Baltic, has a well-formed skaldic stanza in *dróttkvætt* ('court metre'). This stone was erected around the year 1000 to commemorate a Danish chieftain.

Poetry

The runic inscriptions in metrical form show that the Viking Age had, from the very beginning, an oral poetry very like that written down in Iceland in the thirteenth century, based on the common Germanic metrical principle of alliteration. Unlike Old English and Old High German poetry, however, the Scandinavian version is stanzaic and partially syllable-counting. These poems are divided into two main types, Eddic and skaldic, which are quite different in their form, content and function.¹⁹

Eddic poems were traditional, anonymous and, presumably, popular. They comprise ancient tales of gods and heroes, mythic knowledge and narratives

19 For a short survey of Old Norse poetry see P. Hallberg, *Old Icelandic Poetry: Eddic Lay and Scaldic Verse* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1975). See also E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford, 1976); R. Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Scaldic Narrative* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1991). General introductions to Old Norse literature can be found in J. Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature* (Reykjavík, 1988); P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Saga and Society: An Introduction to Old Norse Literature* (Odense, 1993).

that take place in a distant past. The poems present themselves as ancient, but without any precise chronology. The typical metre is *fornyrðislag*, in which the stanza consists of eight half-lines, joined into full lines by alliteration. The main rules for alliteration are that initial consonants alliterate with the same consonant, although clusters like *sk*, *sp* and *st* alliterate only with the same cluster. Vowels, however, alliterate with any other vowel. Each half-line has two stressed syllables and a varying number of unstressed syllables. In a full line, the alliteration is determined by the first stressed syllable of the second half-line, and this syllable alliterates with either one or both of the stressed syllables in the first half-line.

We find an example of this form on a rune stone from Hällestad in Skåne, erected around the year 1000 to commemorate Toke, who died in battle in eastern Sweden. In the text and translation below, the alliterating syllables are italicised.

SaR flo æigi	He ran not <i>off</i>
at Upsalum.	At <i>Upsala</i> .
Sattu drængiaR	<i>Heroes</i> set up,
æftir sinn broður	<i>honouring</i> their brother,
stæin a bjargi	a <i>stone</i> on a hill,
støðan runum.	<i>steadied</i> with runes.
pæir Gorms Toka	They attended
gingu næstiR.	<i>Toke</i> Gormsson.

The written form of this stanza is exceptional at such an early date, when occasional *fornyrðislag* stanzas and longer poems in the same metre were still normally transmitted orally.

We know the poems mainly from the Icelandic manuscript *Codex Regius* dated c. 1270 (see also Chapter 15), which contains eleven mythological and nineteen heroic poems. The collection opens with the visionary poem *Völuspá*, ‘The Prophecy of the Seeress’, which uses grandiose but obscure images to present the course of the heathen world from its creation to its destruction in *Ragnarøk* and into a new creation.²⁰ It is followed by *Hávamál*, ‘The Words of the High One’ (i.e. Odin), a series of didactic stanzas, some concrete and rational, and some magical.²¹ This is followed by three other poems with Odin as a main character, two of which, *Grímnismál*, ‘The Words of Grímnir’, and *Vafþrúðnismál*, ‘The Words of Vafþrúðnir’,

²⁰ *Völuspá* is edited with commentaries by H. Pálsson, *Völuspá* (Edinburgh, 1996).

²¹ *Hávamál* is edited with commentaries by D. A. H. Evans, *Hávamál* (London, 1986).

present mythological knowledge in monologue and dialogue form respectively.

Other poems tell myths. *Skírnismál* reproduces in dialogue form the crucial myth of the god Freyr's sexual passion for the giant maiden Gerd, and his messenger's attempts, using promises, threats and violent curses, to persuade her to meet the god. This *hieros gamos* myth about the meeting between a god and a female from the gods' enemies, the giants, was used to explain pre-Christian royal ideology: the fruit of this union, King Fjölfnir, became the ancestor of the Swedish and Norwegian royal dynasties.²²

Thor is the main character in several poems. *Hymiskviða*, 'The Lay of Hymir', shows his fight with the Midgard serpent, a theme we also find depicted in stone carvings from the Viking Age, showing Thor and the giant Hymir in a boat on the sea (Plate 9). Thor has caught the monster on his great fish-hook and is raising his hammer to despatch it when the frightened giant cuts the fishing-line with his knife. This snapshot presumes knowledge of poems like *Hymiskviða*, telling the myth in which the giant is a mediator between the god and the monster, the latter being a part of the cosmos in pre-Christian thinking. *Þrymskviða* tells a myth which is probably closer to the duality of Christianity. Here, the giant Thrym steals Thor's hammer (Plate 11), the most important defence of the gods, and demands marriage to Freyja to return it. In a burlesque trick – Thor, the manliest of the gods, is dressed up as the bride – the giant is fooled, and he and all his tribe are killed. The myth is a counterpart to that of Freyr and Gerd, where the god and the giantess are united. A marriage between a goddess and a male giant, however, was unacceptable in the mythical way of thinking, as it would mean that the gods lost their mastery of the cosmos.

Most of the *Edda*'s heroic poems have themes from legends about the Volsungs and Niflungs. This complex of legends is also known from the later German *Nibelungenlied* from c. 1200, and there are references to it in the Old English *Beowulf* (eighth century to c. 1000). In Scandinavia, these stories of Sigurd *fáfnisbani* (the slayer of Fáfnir, the dragon), his wife Gudrun, and her brothers Gunnar and Hogni, were popular in both the Viking Age and the Middle Ages, as can be seen from a range of carvings from most of the areas settled by Scandinavians, from the Isle of Man in the west to Sweden in the east (Figure 4).²³

22 G. Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi: En analyse av hierogamimytten i Skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal og Hyndluljóð* (Oslo, 1991).

23 S. Margeson, 'The Volsung legend in medieval art', in F. G. Andersen et al. (eds.), *Medieval Iconography and Narrative: A Symposium* (Odense, 1980), pp. 183–211.

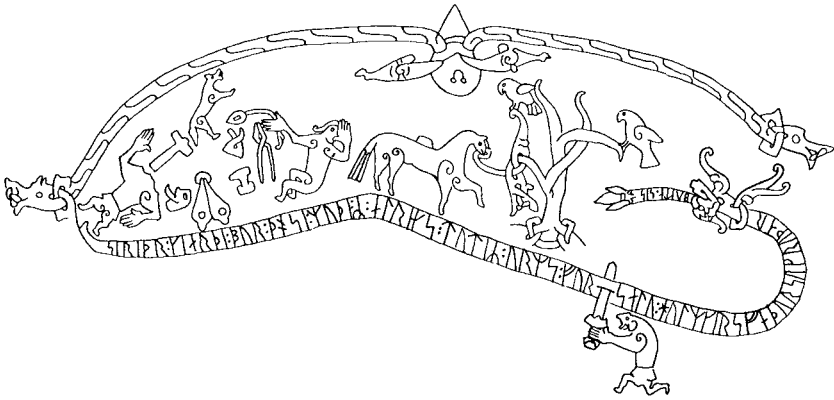


Figure 4 The story of the Germanic hero Sigurd *fáfnisbani* (the dragon-slayer) carved as a runic inscription on the Ramsund rock, Södermanland, Sweden. Eleventh century.

The dating of the surviving Eddic poems is a much-debated question and we have no guarantees that the same poems existed in pre-Christian times, indeed, it seems most likely that they developed through several centuries of oral tradition. The very question about the age of the surviving poems is probably misguided, as change is in the nature of oral composition and it is only with the advent of writing that a fixed form becomes important. We know that the metrical form of the poems is old and we can assume that their contents, the myths and legends, go back to the Viking Age. The rest is a variation on narrative, knowledge and theme, a variation that continued for centuries. It is likely that the best poets and performers created poems that lasted for a long time.

Völuspá, comprising the whole heathen world view in its powerful vision, is probably such a poem, remembered without major alterations from when it was created in the last phase of heathendom as a conscious response to Christian ideology. Some of the poems seem more archaic in language and form than others. The heroic poem *Atlakviða*, telling of Gudrun's second husband, Atli – historically the same as Attila, king of the Huns – who betrays her brothers and has them killed, is possibly an old poem, fortuitously preserved in its Viking Age form.

The geographical origins of the Eddic poems are just as much debated as their age. They were all written down in Iceland but it is likely that similar poems were known throughout Scandinavia in the Viking Age. Some of the surviving poems were probably known in Norway, which had a common language with Iceland, and may even have originated there. Danish heroic

poems are known from Saxo's Latin translation in his history of Denmark, *Gesta Danorum* from c. 1200 (see Chapters 8(b) and 15).²⁴

Unlike Eddic poetry, the matter and function of *skaldic poems* are located in actual situations. As the term indicates, they were composed by professional poets, the skalds. We usually know their names and many of them appear in the sagas. Skalds composed poems about the deeds of princes, their own experiences, love for a woman, or hatred for an enemy. An important aspect of a skald's art was improvisation and he could use a skaldic stanza in repartee. There are many examples of this in the sagas of Icelanders and, even if they are not all genuine, they give, like the kings' sagas, a credible picture of the skalds' activities. While Eddic poems are traditional and impersonal in form, the skald cultivated individual artistry in his compositions. The poem was his original and personal contribution, by which he wished to be remembered. The skald's real audience was the prince and his court, and the core of surviving skaldic poetry is court poetry.

The earliest skalds we know were ninth-century Norwegians. Brage 'the Old' Boddason composed *Ragnarsdrápa* for the Danish Viking king Ragnar Lothbrok, describing the mythological pictures on a painted shield, including Thor's fight with the Midgard serpent. Also most probably from the ninth century is the *Ynglingatal* of Tjodolv, which deals with the legendary kings of Sweden and the Vestfold kings of Norway and their modes of death in thirty-seven stanzas. Living during the transition from heathendom to Christianity, Eyvind Finnsson composed the impressive memorial poem *Hákonarmál* for the Norwegian king Hákon the Good in 961.

Several of the great Icelandic skalds were later depicted in the sagas of Icelanders, notably Egill Skalla-Grímsson, whose saga has preserved most of his improvised poetry plus three *drápur*, longer poems. We know the court poets mainly from the kings' sagas, where their poetry was quoted for purposes of both documentation and embellishment. Among the Icelandic poets who made careers at the courts of Scandinavian kings, Sighvatr Thórðarson composed for both St Olaf and his son Magnus in Norway, as well as for Knut the Great in Denmark. Sighvatr was also an ambassador for King Olaf, demonstrating the high social status of the skald.

No art was more admired than that of the skalds. They were patronised by kings and earls, and their best stanzas unite great art with intellectual depth. It is a personal poetry, in which the poet shows what he can achieve, which is why the skalds laid so much emphasis on artistic form. The great

24 K. Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet* (Rome, 1987).

skalds demonstrated a very subtle consciousness of form and their metres are the most intricate that have ever been developed in Scandinavian literature.

The most common metre was the aforementioned *dróttkvætt* which, like the Eddic *fornyrðislag*, consists of an eight-line stanza with alliteration, but in addition the stanza has regular half-rhyme and full rhyme within the lines. Word order is very free and skalds regularly used a technique whereby two or three sentences were intertwined in a way which makes finding the correct syntax a task in itself.

The most characteristic aspect of skaldic style is found in what are called *kennings*, metaphorical circumlocutions that resemble riddles. The kenning consists of a base word, and a determinant which makes it possible to solve the riddle. For example, 'horse of the sea' is a circumlocution for 'ship': the base word is 'horse' and the determinant is 'of the sea'. Kennings are often based on a legend or myth. Thus, 'the burden of dwarfs' is a kenning for 'sky', because the myth relates that the gods made the sky out of Ymir's skull and placed a dwarf in each of the four corners of the world to hold it up. 'Freyja's tears' is a kenning for 'gold', because Freyja wept tears of gold. A kenning can be expanded with further elements, so that 'gold' could become 'the dew of Freyja's eyelashes', where tears are the dew of eyelashes.

A stanza composed by Eyvind Finnsson for the Norwegian king Harald Grey-fur can be cited as an example of skaldic art.²⁵ The alliterations are marked by bold type, the half- and full rhymes by italics:

Bárum, *Ullr*, um *alla*,
 ímunlauks, á *hauka*
 fjøllum Fýrisvalla
 fræ Hákonar ævi;
 nú hefir fólksríðir Fróða
 fáglyjaðra þýja
meldr í **móður holdi**
mellu dolgs um *folgin*.

A literal translation in prose word order would be: Ull of the battle-leek! We carried the seed-corn of the Fyris plains on the hawk-mountains for the whole of Hákon's life; now the enemy of the people has hidden the flour of Frodi's joyless slave-women in the flesh of the mother of the giant-woman's enemy.

²⁵ The stanza is also commented on in Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*; and by K. von See, *Skaldendichtung: Eine Einführung* (München and Zürich, 1980).

To understand the stanza, we have to interpret its kennings. The skald begins by addressing the king and calling him 'Ull of the battle-leek'. A 'battle-leek' (and here we have to imagine its blade above the ground) is a kenning for 'sword' and Ull is a god's name, so the 'god of the battle-leek' is the warrior, the king. The 'seed-corn of the plains of Fyris' is 'gold', based on the legend of the heroic Danish king, Rolv *kraki*, who strewed the gold behind him when fleeing with his champions from the army of the Swedish king. The 'hawk-mountains' are the 'arms' on which a hawk sits when the hawk is out hunting. In the second half of the stanza, King Harald Grey-fur is called the 'enemy of the people'. The 'flour of the joyless slave-women of Frode' is a new kenning for 'gold', referring to the legend in which the Danish king Frode used two giant-women Fenja and Menja as slaves to turn the grinding mill Grotti, which produced gold and not flour. Finally, the 'flesh of the mother of the giant-woman's enemy' is a multi-element mythological kenning. The 'enemy of giant-women' is the god Thor. Thor's mother is Jord (Earth), and her flesh is the earth.

A brief paraphrase of the stanza would be 'When Håkon was king, we wore gold on our arms. Now you, King Harald, have buried it in the earth.' Thus, Håkon was generous, as a king should be, but Harald is a tight-fisted and therefore despicable king. Through the kennings, the two historical kings are each compared with a legendary king: Håkon with the ideal king Rolv and Harald with the unlucky Frode. Thus, skaldic poetry could be political, too.

Ornamental and figurative art

The Viking Age was notably fond of decoration, probably in all social classes. Art, both ornamental and figurative, was vital, confident and common throughout Scandinavia.²⁶ It strove for contrast, colour and harmonic movement. It was a heavily stylised and mainly applied art, unfurling in a lively fashion on functional (in the broadest sense) objects of every kind: ships, sledges, buildings, furniture, brooches, bowls, cups and much else besides (Plates 12 and 14). Apart from two groups of memorial stones (the decorated rune stones and the picture stones from the Baltic island of Gotland) (Plate 13),

26 D. M. Wilson, and O. Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* (London, 1966, repr. 1980); Graham-Campbell, *Viking Artefacts*, passim; S. H. Fuglesang, 'Art', in Roesdahl and Wilson, *From Viking to Crusader*, pp. 178–83; Roesdahl and Wilson, *From Viking to Crusader*, passim; S. H. Fuglesang, 'Viking art', in Ph. Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1993), pp. 694–700; Graham-Campbell, *Cultural Atlas*, pp. 98–9 and passim; D. M. Wilson, *Vikingatidens konst* (*Signums svenska konsthistoria*, 2, Lund, 1994).

almost all surviving art objects are purely secular, unlike in contemporary Christian Europe. Many survive because they acquired a secondary function as grave goods in heathen burials.

Ornamental art had its roots in the fifth century AD and the motifs were primarily stylised animals. Whether an imported influence from western Europe or an independent Scandinavian creation, a specific type of animal ornament – the gripping beast – entered Scandinavian art towards the beginning of the Viking Age. It is a lively, strong beast with a head seen from the front and feet gripping everything. It remained popular for nearly 200 years (Plate 15). Animal motifs remained dominant throughout the Viking Age, but birds, snakes, ribbons and knots also appeared and, from the middle of the tenth century, western European plant ornaments stimulated the further development of animal ornament. Masks are also seen but human figures are otherwise rare.

We no longer know how contemporaries understood these motifs. Most likely they were mainly decorative and without any specific meaning, although some may have had a particular significance. This is especially true of the great beast (probably a lion) entwined with a snake, which was introduced on King Harald Bluetooth's large rune stone at Jelling when Christianity was publicly introduced into Denmark (see Chapter 7) (Figure 5; Plates 21 and 22): this remained an important motif in art for over a century and a half, in the end mainly on jewellery.

There was also a narrative art,²⁷ in a characteristically semi-naturalistic style, clearly distinct from the idiom of ornamental art. Most significant in the surviving material is the group of large picture stones from Gotland, traditionally dated to the eighth and ninth centuries, although some of them may be up to a hundred years later. Some of the scenes can be identified with myths or legends known from Old Norse literature. A few monuments in stone from elsewhere in Scandinavia or from areas of the British Isles with Viking settlement (e.g. the Isle of Man) have narrative art in the same style and with the same type of motifs: the heathen god Thor's fishing trip or the story of Sigurd *fáfnisbani* (see above). Images from myths and legends used to decorate shields and the walls of halls are described in skaldic poems, and from

27 See note 26; S. Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine*, 1–2 (Stockholm, 1941–2); R. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London, 1980); S. H. Fuglesang, 'Ikonographie der skandinavischen Runensteine der jüngeren Wikingerzeit', in H. Roth (ed.), *Zum Problem der Deutung frühmittelalterlicher Bildinhalte* (Sigmaringen, 1986), pp. 183–210; E. Nylén and J. P. Lamm, *Stones, Ships and Symbols* (Stockholm, 1988); P. M. C. Kermode, *Manx Crosses. With an Introduction by David M. Wilson* (Angus, 1994, 2nd edn; 1st edn 1906).



Figure 5 Three sides of the Jelling stone, Denmark, c. 970.

the very end of the Viking Age we have some Christian pictures. But despite much research only a few of these images can be identified and understood today.

Woodcarving was undoubtedly the most important form of artistic expression, probably along with textiles. However, objects of metal (especially bronze, silver and gold) survive the best, often as clothing fasteners in a range of qualities. Some fasteners were mass-produced, and a variety of techniques were employed. Other materials were also used, whale- and other bone, antler of deer, elk and reindeer, walrus tusk, and amber (Plates 14 and 16). Relief effects were favoured, with contrasts of materials and colours as well as the play of plain and ornamented surfaces. A brooch could be of gilt bronze with silver and niello; a stirrup could have patterns in silver and copper against

black iron; gold and silver jewellery was often embellished with filigree and granulation. These techniques were then imitated in cheaper moulded and gilt bronze jewellery.

Larger items of wood and stone were often painted, as we can see from traces of colour on furniture, shields, building timber and rune stones, for instance, as well as from references in skaldic poems and in some Swedish rune stone inscriptions. Sometimes we are told the names of both the carver and the painter – rune stones are the only signed works of art from the Viking Age in Scandinavia. The colours it has been possible to reconstruct were bright and usually several were used to create contrast and clarity. Black, white and red were common, but brown, yellow, blue and green are also known. Clothing was also brightly multi-coloured and sometimes had embroidered patterns, as can be seen from the fragments in the chieftain's grave from Mammen, Denmark.²⁸

The ornamental idiom developed quickly in the Viking Age, and the art is usually classified into different styles: Style III:E (emphasising continuity with earlier art), Borre style, Jellinge style, Mammen style, Ringerike style and Urnes style (Plate 20). Most are named after the sites at which good examples of the style have been found and, with the exception of the Borre and Jelling styles, which were more or less contemporaneous, each developed out of and supplanted its predecessor. This development happened partly as a result of external influences, especially from England and from the Frankish and German empires. Older theories about influences from Ireland or the Orient are not supported by the evidence and today scholars generally emphasise internal development and continuity.

Scandinavian art had some effect on art in those areas of England, Ireland and Russia which had Scandinavian settlement, but not as far as we know in Normandy. In England and on the Isle of Man, stone monuments continued to be produced by the Scandinavianised population, sometimes decorated in a local version of Scandinavian styles. Some of the most interesting are the tenth-century stone cross, about 4.5 m high, from Gosforth in Cumbria, with both heathen and Christian images (Plate 17), and the house-shaped gravestones called 'hogbacks' in northern England. Some of these, notably in Brompton, have muzzled bears of unknown significance at the gable ends. The early eleventh-century gravestone from St Paul's churchyard in London

²⁸ On colours, see references cited in note 26, *passim*; Roesdahl, *Viking Age Denmark*, p. 187; Jansson, *Runes*, pp. 153–61; M. Iversen (ed.), *Mammen: Grav, kunst og samfund i vikingetid* (Århus, 1991), p. 123–53.

(and thus from Knut the Great's time), inscribed with runes and decorated in the Ringerike style, is however a purely Scandinavian product.²⁹

Besides formal art there are also some graffiti. As everywhere, such pictures are quick sketches of whatever was in the carver's sight or mind. A comb from Sigtuna in Sweden shows the Christ Child, elsewhere we see some elegant ornament or animals, but most commonly the graffiti show ships with elegantly curved prows.

Architecture

The four Danish circular fortresses – Trelleborg (Plate 18), Nonnebakken, Fyrkat and Aggersborg – demonstrate Scandinavian prestige architecture. These and other large sites also show that Scandinavian kings and engineers were just as capable of complicated spatial planning as they were of planning large military actions. The circular fortresses were put up by King Harald Bluetooth around 980 and were used for only a short time, but they belong to a series of large building projects from his reign. The fortresses vary in size from Aggersborg's 240 m internal diameter to Fyrkat's 120 m. The construction materials were turf, earth and timber. The earthwork was a perfect circle with gates at the four points of the compass. These gates were linked by streets both through the centre of the fortress and around the inside of the earthwork. Each quadrant of the fortress had large, equal-sized houses arranged in quadrangles.³⁰

No standing buildings survive from the period, but excavations and re-used timber give an impression of what they were like. Thus, there are good examples of large houses from the circular fortresses. Only postholes survived, but these showed that the houses were built of timber with straight gable-ends and curved long walls, which meant that the ridge and surfaces of the roof were also curved. A full-scale reconstruction of one of the houses from Fyrkat (c. 28 m in length) has been undertaken: the result is a vibrant and supple building (Plate 19). Upper-class secular buildings were most likely

29 See note 26; Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*; J. Graham-Campbell, 'From Scandinavia to the Irish Sea: Viking Art reviewed', in M. Ryan (ed.), *Ireland and Insular Art A.D. 500–1200* (Dublin, 1987), pp. 144–52; Roesdahl and Wilson, *From Viking to Crusader*, pp. 74–87, 96–105, cat. nos. 259–312, 365–431; Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, pp. 168–77 and passim; Kermode, *Manx Crosses*.

30 O. Olsen and H. Schmidt, *Fyrkat: En jysk vikingeborg*, 1: *Borgen og bebyggelsen* (København, 1977); E. Roesdahl, 'The Danish geometrical Viking fortresses and their context', in *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 9 (*Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1986, 1987*), pp. 208–26; E. Roesdahl, 'Prestige, display and monuments in Viking Age Scandinavia', in H. Galinié (ed.), *Les Mondes Normands (VIII^e–XII^es.)* (Caen, 1989), pp. 17–25.

decorated with carvings, as we can see from re-used timber in late Viking Age churches such as that at Urnes in Norway (Plate 20) and Hørning in Denmark.³¹

Sacred buildings are hardly known from the heathen period. The monumental architecture of this time consisted of large burial and memorial mounds, and stone settings in the form of ships. The building of a mound involved the precise calculation of size, shape and outline. They were built of carefully laid turf, and in the chieftain's grave at Ladby, Denmark, a circle of closely packed posts was found, marking the foot of the mound and preventing its slipping outward.³² Today, the mounds are greatly reduced: they have collapsed inwards, the foot has slipped outwards and the shape has often been disturbed by human activity.

At Jelling, the mounds, ship-setting and rune stones, all of royal dimensions, formed a series of colossal landscape sculptures (Plates 21 and 22). Archaeological investigations and dendrochronological datings in recent decades have shed new light on its complicated construction history. There were three main building phases stretching through several decades around the middle and second half of the tenth century. It started as a heathen dynastic monument in two distinct phases, begun by King Gorm and enlarged by his son Harald Bluetooth, but after the official acceptance of Christianity in Denmark around 965, the same Harald turned it into a Christian dynastic monument including a large church. The original axis, defined by a ship-setting probably about 170 m long, was retained, even though the ship-setting – the largest in Scandinavia – was destroyed by this transformation into a Christian monument. King Harald's great decorated rune stone still stands on its original spot, on the axis just south of the present church (built c. 1100) and precisely halfway between the two great mounds, the focal point of the Christian site (Figure 5). Its inscription reads: 'King Harald ordered these monuments to be made in honour of his father, Gorm, and his mother, Tyre – that Harald who won for himself all Denmark, and Norway, and made the Danes Christian.' With its long inscription in horizontal rows and its large images, the stone appears to have been partly inspired by Christian manuscript art. The north mound was originally a heathen burial mound built for Harald's father King Gorm and closed around 958–9. After the introduction of Christianity some years later, Gorm was probably moved to the grave which has been found in Jelling's first

³¹ Olsen and Schmidt, *Fyrkat*; Schmidt, *Building Customs*.

³² O. Olsen, *Hørg, hov og kirke: Historiske og arkæologiske vikingetidsstudier* (København, 1966); Roesdahl, *Viking Age Denmark*, pp. 163–8; T. Capelle, 'Schiffsetzungen', *Prähistorische Zeitschrift*, 61:1 (1986), pp. 1–63.

church. The south mound was also built in this earliest Christian period, without a burial and probably as a cenotaph and memorial or for public ceremonies performed on its large flat top.³³

The Jelling monuments were created for royal display in the final years of heathendom and the first years of Christianity. The monuments from both these periods are the biggest of their kind in Denmark and (apart from the ship-setting) they could remain side by side when the new faith became the country's official religion. It is noteworthy that in his Christian rebuilding, King Harald used traditional Scandinavian monuments (like the rune stone and the mound) as far as possible, but in a new way, and that there was still a focus on the dynasty. The architecture of Jelling gives a clear signal of continuity and emphasis on traditional culture, despite the conversion to Christianity. No doubt this was also a political message.

The view that the people of the Viking Age were romantic, primitive and sometimes noble barbarians is a construction that came out of a symbiosis of the nineteenth century's view of culture, the lapidary and foreign accounts of heathen men's harryings in the Viking Age, and the dramatic tales told in the outstanding literature of the later Norse sagas. This view was supported by the national romantic art of the nineteenth century, inspired by the same sources.³⁴ Recently, this view has changed in tandem with both our increased archaeological knowledge about conditions in Scandinavia and a new approach to textual sources, as well as a new view of culture and many years' interdisciplinary research into the period.

33 K. J. Krogh, 'The royal Viking-Age monuments in Jelling in the light of recent archaeological excavations', *Acta Archaeologica*, 53 (1982), pp. 183–218; Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, pp. 161–5 and passim; K. J. Krogh and O. Olsen, 'From paganism to Christianity', in S. Hvass and B. Storgaard (eds.), *Digging into the Past: 25 Years of Archaeology in Denmark* (Copenhagen, 1993), pp. 233–6; K. J. Krogh, *Gåden om Kong Gorms Grav: historien om Nordhøjen i Jelling* (København, 1993).

34 H. Zettel, *Das Bild der Normannen und der Normanneneinfälle in westfränkischen, ostfränkischen und angelsächsischen Quellen des 8. bis 11. Jahrhunderts* (München, 1977); R. Page, 'A most vile people' (*The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies*, London, 1986); E. Roesdahl and P. Meulengracht Sørensen (eds.), *The Waking of Agantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture* (Århus, 1996); D. M. Wilson, *Vikings and Gods in European Art* (Højbjerg, 1997).

Scandinavia enters Christian Europe

BIRGIT SAWYER AND PETER SAWYER

It was not until the ninth century that significant numbers of Scandinavians were converted to Christianity, but some knowledge of Christian beliefs and rituals had reached Scandinavia much earlier. A few Scandinavians encountered Christians and their churches even before the collapse of the Roman Empire in the west, and in the eighth century the commercial links between Christian Europe and the Baltic region provided opportunities for some Scandinavians to meet Christian merchants and to visit the great Christian market at Dorestad. This trade also made it easier for missionaries to reach pagans living in the coastal regions north of the Rhine.

As early as the first years of the eighth century Willibrord, an English monk who had been working in Frisia, extended his mission to the Danes, probably travelling in a merchant ship to Ribe. He soon abandoned the attempt and sailed back to Frisia with thirty boys, presumably in the hope that some of them would eventually preach to the Danes in their own language. It was, however, over a hundred years before missionaries returned to the Danes. For the Frankish rulers on whose support missionaries like Willibrord depended it was more important to convert their immediate neighbours – the Frisians, Saxons and other Germans beyond the Rhine – than the more distant Danes.

Early missions

By the beginning of the ninth century the Franks had subjected and forcibly converted the Saxons south of the river Elbe. This made the Danes their neighbours, across the no man's land of Nordalbingia. The Danes were then ruled by Godfred, who actively opposed Frankish expansion, but in the succession disputes that followed his assassination in 810 some of the contestants, including Godfred's sons, continued to oppose the Franks, while others were prepared to come to terms with them – and one, Harald, actively welcomed their support. In 819 the Franks helped him to regain power in an uneasy partnership with

Godfred's sons. This made it possible for Ebbo, archbishop of Rheims, to lead a mission to Harald's part of the kingdom.

Ebbo's base was, however, not in Danish territory but at *Welaneo*, now Münsterdorf, under the shelter of the northernmost Frankish fort at Itzehoe on the river Stör. For most of his reign Harald was threatened by his partners, and in 826, in order to secure continued Frankish support he accepted baptism at Mainz, with the Frankish emperor, Louis the Pious, as sponsor. He returned to Denmark accompanied by, among others, a monk called Anskar, but a year later he was expelled from his kingdom and spent the rest of his life in exile.

It was some compensation for the failure of the Danish mission that in 829 a king of the *Svear*, who occupied what is now eastern Sweden, asked Louis to send preachers to Birka. Anskar was chosen for this task. After about eighteen months he returned having made a good beginning. His greatest success was the conversion of Herigar, described as prefect of Birka, who built a church on his own land. Ebbo appointed Gauzbert, a kinsman, as bishop of Birka, and Anskar was given the newly created see of Hamburg, which was soon raised to an archbishopric by the pope who also gave Anskar joint authority with Ebbo 'among the *Svear*, Danes, Slavs and other peoples inhabiting the northern regions'.

Anskar's position was, however, weakened in 835 when Ebbo was deprived of his archbishopric for supporting the deposition of Louis in 833. In 845 Anskar suffered a more serious setback when a fleet sent by the Danish king Horik sacked Hamburg and destroyed his cathedral. As Christianity had been preached as a religion of power and success, such a demonstration of failure must have raised doubts about its efficacy and may well have been responsible for the violent pagan reaction to the Birka mission in that year which caused Gauzbert to flee and seek a safer position as bishop of Osnabrück.

The year 845 nevertheless saw the beginning of a remarkable change in Anskar's fortunes. The immediate cause was a fatal disease that afflicted some of the Danes who attacked Paris in that year. Some of them, including their leader, Ragnar, survived long enough to return home and tell King Horik what had happened. Ragnar attributed his illness to the power of St Germain, whose monastery they had sacked. When Ragnar and many of his companions died, the king was so frightened that he had the survivors executed, and returned all the Christians captured in the raids on Hamburg and Paris to their own countries. If the sack of Hamburg demonstrated the failure of the Christian God to protect his own, the fate of those who attacked Paris was a significant counter demonstration that prepared the way for Horik's acceptance of Anskar.

The sack of Hamburg eventually worked to Anskar's advantage for he was compensated by being given the richer see of Bremen to hold jointly with Hamburg. He could consequently afford to make the gifts that were needed to gain access to the Danish court. This combination of circumstances resulted eventually in Anskar's reception on friendly terms by Horik, who allowed a church to be built at Hedeby. According to Rimbert, Anskar's successor as archbishop, the existence of this church stimulated trade as Christian merchants were encouraged to visit Hedeby 'without fear, which they could not do earlier'. This may, indeed, have been an important consideration in inviting missionaries to Birka and other trading places. Horik also helped Anskar to revive the mission in Birka. Horik's successor, with the same name, was also on good terms with Anskar. He allowed a church to be built in Ribe, and in 864 sent gifts to Pope Nicolaus II, who thanked the king but criticised him for refusing baptism.

Anskar died in 865. His *Vita*, written by Rimbert, is the most important source of knowledge about the ninth-century missions to Scandinavia. The next major contemporary source for Scandinavia and its conversion is Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum*, written 200 years after Anskar's death. Like Anskar's *Vita*, Adam's work is largely concerned with justifying the claims of his archbishopric to lead the church in Scandinavia; he had little to say about the tenth century. The dearth of information about the decades after Anskar's time makes it impossible to say whether the missionary work he had begun continued. In 936 a later archbishop, Unni, visited Birka and died there, but his purpose is not known. He may have been attempting to revive a lapsed mission, as Anskar had done earlier. Alternatively his purpose could have been to restore Hamburg-Bremen's authority over a church that had become too independent.

Unni's successor, Adaldag, consecrated bishops for Schleswig, Ribe and Århus in or before 948. His motive was not to encourage missionary activity but to have the suffragans he needed to maintain his archiepiscopal status. They did not necessarily ever visit Denmark, let alone establish sees. The only one about whom Adam of Bremen reports additional information, Liafdag, supposedly bishop of Ribe, is said to have preached in Sweden and Norway, which suggests that he was a missionary, not a diocesan, bishop. The suspicion that these three bishops did not occupy regular sees is reinforced by the fact that Adam does not name their successors. Odense is named as a bishopric in an imperial diploma of 988. It had been a pagan cult centre and was later a centre of royal power, and may well have been a base for a missionary bishop attached to the royal court, but there is no reliable evidence that there was a

regular episcopal see there, or anywhere else in Scandinavia, before the time of Knut the Great.¹

Whether or not churches survived in Denmark or Sweden, there are several indications that the toleration of Christian missionaries shown in Anskar's time by kings of the Danes and of the *Svear* was continued by at least some of their tenth-century successors. One result was that some Scandinavians were prepared to accept that Christ was a god, if not the only one. As the German chronicler Widukind, writing about a century after Anskar's death, remarked: 'the Danes have long been Christians but they nevertheless worshipped idols with pagan rituals'.

Most conversions of Scandinavians in the ninth century happened in western Europe. Vikings as well as envoys or merchants, must have been impressed by the enormous wealth and elaborate rituals of the great churches in the Frankish empire and the British Isles, and when Viking leaders came to terms with Christian rulers they normally accepted baptism. These conversions were not all permanent, and one Frankish archbishop complained that converts who reverted to pagan ways were behaving 'like typical Northmen'. Some conversions were, however, sincere and by the beginning of the tenth century most of the Scandinavians who had settled in western Europe, or their descendants, were as Christian as their native neighbours.

During the tenth century there were in England some priests and monks of Danish descent, including three archbishops. Such men were naturally sympathetic supporters of missions to Scandinavia, just as two centuries earlier Christian Saxons in England felt an obligation to preach the Gospel to their pagan kinsmen in Saxony. The tenth- and eleventh-century English missionaries did not limit their evangelism to the Danes, they also worked elsewhere in Scandinavia, and were especially important in Norway. As that part of Scandinavia was outside the range of the earlier Frankish missionaries, virtually nothing is known about the progress of Christianity there in the ninth century, although it does seem likely that by the year 900, if not before, Christianity was tolerated in coastal districts there as it was by some Danes and *Svear*.

Christian kings

The toleration of missionaries in the ninth and early tenth centuries prepared the way for the next stage of Christianisation, the formal acceptance of the

¹ P. Sawyer, *Da Danmark blev Danmark* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarks Historie*, 3, København, 1988), pp. 239–45, 296–9.

exclusive claims of the Christian God, which meant the abandonment of traditional cults, or their reduction to mere superstitions, a dramatic break with the past that required the support of rulers. The first king to be baptised in Scandinavia was the Dane, Harald Gormsson, who proclaimed that he had 'made the Danes Christian' on the huge runic monument he had erected at Jelling (see Chapter 6). His own conversion, which happened in about 965, was widely believed to have been brought about by a priest proving that Christ was the one true God by a miracle involving an ordeal by hot iron. According to Widukind, writing in 968, the king converted, resolved that Christ alone should be worshipped as God, ordered all people subject to him to reject idols, and thereafter gave due honour to priests and God's servants. Some Danes continued to sacrifice to their old gods in traditional ways, but not for long; by the end of the century pagan forms of burial had been abandoned.

Harald was driven into exile and died, probably in about 986. He was succeeded by his son, Sven Forkbeard. Adam of Bremen claimed that Sven began his reign as an apostate and that the revolt against Harald was a heathen reaction. There is no evidence to support this and the fact that a church was built in Lund in or shortly before 990 suggests that Adam was mistaken. Sven's refusal to accept that the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen had any authority over the Danish church was reason enough for Adam to treat him as an enemy of Christianity. Adam had to admit, however, that later in his reign Sven was a Christian king, who contributed to the conversion of Norway and appointed an English bishop to preach in Skåne.

There is no doubt about the conventional piety of Knut, Sven's son and successor as king of both the Danes and the English. He was a generous benefactor of churches on the Continent as well as in England, and was the first Scandinavian king to visit Rome, where he prayed at the shrines of the apostles, and was received by the pope. He recruited several English bishops to work in Denmark and, presumably in the light of his experience in England, he began to create regular dioceses in Denmark, the first in Scandinavia. He apparently hoped to free the Danish church from the authority of Hamburg-Bremen and in 1022 he had a bishop of Roskilde consecrated in England by the archbishop of Canterbury.² However, Knut was later forced to recognise that such a breach of church law and tradition was unacceptable. When he died in 1035 the church in Denmark was well established and Hamburg-Bremen's claims were unchallenged.

2 N. Lund, 'Cnut's Danish kingdom', in A. Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut* (London, 1994), pp. 27–42.

There are indications that at least one Norwegian king publicly acknowledged Christianity earlier than Harald Gormsson. Early in the tenth century the Norwegian king, Harald Finehair, sent his son Håkon to be fostered in the court of the English king Athelstan. Although this arrangement was apparently made for political or diplomatic, not religious, reasons, it had important religious consequences when Håkon eventually succeeded his father. He was remembered as the first king actively to encourage Christianity in Norway and there may be some truth in the later tradition that he invited English missionaries to Norway. That tradition is supported by the recent discovery on Veøy in Romsdal in northern Vestlandet, of a churchyard that was possibly established a little before the year 950.

According to Snorri Sturluson Håkon encountered determined resistance in Trøndelag, which was then ruled by Sigurd, earl of Lade, who was prepared to acknowledge Håkon as his overlord, but not to accept his overlord's religion. Snorri's claim that Håkon abandoned Christianity and was given a pagan burial is supported by the skaldic poem *Håkonarmál* (see Chapter 6) composed in his memory after his death in battle against his Christian nephews. The poet described Håkon as a heathen who faced Odin's hostility in Valhalla because he had failed the god but was nevertheless accepted because he had not been hostile to the traditional religion. The implication of this remarkable poem is that Håkon had at least for a while accepted Christianity personally, but had not made any serious effort to impose it on his people. The skald, Eyvind Finnsson, was apparently contrasting Håkon's attitude with that of his less tolerant successors.

The religious situation in Norway in the mid-tenth century thus seems to have been much like that described by Widukind in Denmark, with the significant difference that in large parts of Norway pagan burial customs were abandoned earlier than in the Danish kingdom. In the coastal regions of south and west Norway the proportion of burials furnished with grave goods was already declining in the first half of the tenth century. The survival of older forms of burial inland and in Trøndelag strongly suggests that the change reflects the success of missionaries who were encouraged, or at least allowed, to preach, and even to establish churches, in other parts of Norway. A list commemorating monks of the English monastery of Glastonbury who were bishops in the reign of King Edgar (959–75) includes *Sigefridus norwegensis episcopus*,³ and there is no good reason to doubt that he was a missionary in Norway. It

3 F. Birkeli, 'The earliest missionary activities from England to Norway', *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 15 (1971), pp. 27–37.

was in the same coastal districts that large stone crosses, up to 4 metres high, and rune stones with crosses carved on them were erected in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. Many of these were apparently placed in pagan cemeteries by, or in memory of, converts before there were Christian graveyards.

The early progress of Christianity in Norway has been obscured by the emphasis later put on the role of Olaf Tryggvason. According to Ari, who wrote a history of Iceland early in the twelfth century, Olaf was responsible for the conversion of both Norway and Iceland, and later writers followed Ari's lead. There is no doubt that Olaf was an active supporter of Christianity. It is not known where he was baptised, but he was certainly confirmed in England in 995 with the English king as his sponsor. A more reliable indication of his enthusiasm for Christianity than the traditions reported in the sagas is the fact that the court poets, who had earlier made great use of mythological kennings, began to show an aversion for such echoes of paganism in, or immediately after, his reign. It does, though, seem likely that any missionary activity that he undertook in Norway was to consolidate a process that had begun decades earlier. Olaf's main contribution to the conversion of Norway was his conquest of Trøndelag, whose rulers had remained obstinately pagan. It may have been this achievement that is referred to in the runic inscription on the island of Kuli, about 125 km west of Trondheim, commemorating a man who died after 'Christendom had been in Norway twelve winters'.

Ari gave a fairly detailed account of the conversion of Iceland, based on what he had been told by Teitr, son of Ísleifr, the first native Icelandic bishop. According to him, Christianity was formally accepted after a heated dispute at the *Althing* in the year 1000 (999 by our reckoning). The change was urged by Christian chieftains who had been baptised by Thangbrand, the missionary sent by King Olaf, but the decision was left to the pagan lawspeaker who declared that 'if we break the law in pieces then we break the peace in pieces too'. It was agreed that all men should be baptised. A period of transition was allowed in which Icelanders could offer sacrifices in private, eat horse-meat and practise infanticide, but 'a few years later this heathendom was abolished like the rest'. Ari exaggerated the part played by his own family and friends, and he oversimplified; knowledge of Christianity reached Iceland through many channels, from the British Isles as well as from an incompletely christianised Norway. Ari mentions a number of missionaries from various quarters, but does not credit them with any specific achievements. As in other parts of Scandinavia they were probably invited by different chieftains.

In Sweden Olof Skötkonung was later generally recognised as the first Christian king, but the traditional date for his conversion, 1008, must be too

late; he was already issuing Christian coins by 995 from Sigtuna, which had been founded about twenty years earlier and may have been a Christian settlement from the start. Christian rune-stones and pagan burials show that in Svealand Christians and pagans lived alongside each other throughout the eleventh century. Pagan cults continued to be celebrated at Uppsala, which was only 29 km from Sigtuna, until about 1080. The new religion was more firmly rooted earlier in Västergötland; the runic inscriptions suggest that it was widely accepted there at much the same time as in Denmark. It was moreover there, not in Svealand, that Olof Skötkonung was able to establish the first Swedish bishopric. This was initially at Husaby, a royal residence, but by the middle of the century it was moved to Skara, a transfer that is paralleled elsewhere. The sees of Lund and Bergen, for example, were originally at Dalby and on the island of Selja respectively.

Early church organisation

The archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen had very little to do with the progress of Christianity in Scandinavia in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and could not claim credit for the conversion of any Scandinavian king. Nevertheless popes had given them authority over the whole of Scandinavia, and they were eager to demand their rights once the church was established there. Any ambiguity about the extent of the legatine authority given to Ebbo and Anskar was removed in 1053 when Pope Leo IX explicitly defined the archbishop's province as encompassing not only the *Svear* and the Danes, who had been named before, but also 'Norway, Iceland, Greenland and all the northern nations'.

The archbishops were, however, not free agents. Like their suffragan bishops, they were subject to the law of the Church and papal authority. The ecclesiastical hierarchy in Scandinavia was being created at a time of fundamental change in the western Church as reformers tried to free it from secular control and to have the superior authority of the pope fully recognised. Their efforts inevitably caused disputes in the Church and with lay rulers. The most serious conflict, between Gregory VII, one of the leading reformers who was pope from 1073 to 1085, and the German king, Henry IV, had important consequences for Scandinavia. Liemar, archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, supported Henry and was consequently deprived of his see by Gregory. This had little effect on Liemar's position in Germany, but the crisis encouraged the papal curia to consider reducing Hamburg-Bremen's authority by creating a Scandinavian archbishopric. This possibility was first considered by Gregory VII but

the change was not made until 1103, or possibly 1104, when Lund became an archbishopric with the whole of Scandinavia as its province.

Before Christianity was publicly accepted, missionaries must have depended on the protection and hospitality of rulers and magnates who were well disposed to them. Later, when kings were Christian, a royal retinue would normally include a bishop to perform liturgical functions and advise the king. It was some time before ecclesiastical organisation in Scandinavia conformed to the pattern of the Church elsewhere, with bishops permanently based in their cathedral churches, ruling dioceses with settled boundaries. This happened first in Denmark where, by about 1060, all the medieval sees had been established. It was about ten years later that the Norwegian king Olaf Kyrre founded sees in Nidaros and on Selja, which was probably transferred to Bergen before the king's death in 1093. He may also have founded the see of Oslo. In the predominantly Norwegian colonies in the west, episcopal organisation was also well advanced by the end of the eleventh century.

The early development of the Swedish sees is obscure, but by the year 1100 there were probably cathedrals in Linköping and Sigtuna as well as Skara, although diocesan boundaries were not then fixed. The network of Scandinavian bishoprics was not complete until the thirteenth century, but the progress made by the time Lund was made an archbishopric is remarkable testimony to the organising power of the universal Church.

By the end of the eleventh century Christianity had begun to affect all levels of Scandinavian society. Numerous churches had been built, many of them by landowners with clergy who were, in effect, their servants. Bishops were responsible for the consecration of churches and the ordination of clergy, and were therefore able to ensure that church buildings and their fittings conformed to the law of the Church and that clergy had at least a basic training in their duties; patrons of churches and their clergy were not free to design churches as they liked or to devise their own rituals. The first churches were timber structures that have left few traces but many were rebuilt in stone in the twelfth century. The remarkable similarity of these early stone churches with contemporary rural churches in England and Germany is a good illustration of the way the church contributed to the integration of Scandinavia with Europe. There are many others. The Church introduced a new language, Latin, and a new script, the alphabet, that were used for centuries alongside Scandinavian languages and runes. It brought new forms of worship that runic inscriptions, discussed below, and fragments of liturgical manuscripts suggest were already very influential in the eleventh century. Churchmen also introduced a vast and varied literature, including the Bible, lives of saints, letter collections,

chronicles and other forms of historical writing. These were used in educating future clergy and eventually provided models for native literature. In Norway and Iceland such writings were soon translated into the vernacular and written in an 'insular' script which reveals English influence.

In the early stages of Christianisation missionaries said little about such theological subtleties as the Trinity or the Virgin birth and concentrated on the power of a militant Christ to ensure success in this world and salvation from eternal damnation in the next. Their main purpose was to demonstrate that their God was not just more powerful than other gods, but was indeed the only true God and that all others were demons. One persuasive argument was that Christ had triumphed in the rich and fertile parts of Europe with which many Scandinavians were familiar. The disruption of churches by Vikings must have raised doubts about Christ's power but it was explained by Christians as a divine punishment for their sins. Victories won by Christians were, in contrast, proof that their God was supreme. Miracles, such as the ordeal that convinced Harald Gormsson, and the impunity with which missionaries and Christian kings destroyed idols and defied pagan taboos were further proofs of the power of Christ. Significantly, it was not until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the concept of the suffering Christ took root in Scandinavia; before that he was depicted as a triumphant prince even on the cross.

Most of the early bishops in Scandinavia were foreigners; many of them from England or Germany. Some, who had experience of the workings of royal government in Christian kingdoms, taught Scandinavians to use documents as evidence of grants or other transactions. They were also largely responsible for the compilation of the first written laws and in doing so they began to modify traditional customs in accordance with the law of the Church, although church law was not always, or in all parts of Scandinavia, accepted. Novelties that were widely adopted included the rule that gifts could be made by the dying without the consent of heirs, and that all children, including unmarried daughters, were entitled to a legally fixed share of an inheritance, a rule that enabled women as well as men to give to pious causes 'for the sake of their souls'. The operation of this new rule is reflected in some runic inscriptions, although it was not generally accepted until the fourteenth century. Although laws were, at least in Norway, written down in the eleventh century they only survive in versions that were compiled or edited after 1100, but there is no reason to doubt that some changes were already being made under the influence of Christian advisers before then.

Runic inscriptions

The most abundant evidence for the progress of Christianity in Scandinavia before the twelfth century is provided by over 2,000 runic memorials that were made between the last quarter of the tenth century and the beginning of the twelfth. The late Viking Age fashion for monuments with runic inscriptions that were basically very similar began in Denmark and was probably inspired by Harald Gormsson's monument at Jelling, and continued longest in eastern Sweden where the majority of these inscriptions are found. The relatively late development of churches and graveyards in eastern Sweden gave this form of Christian monument a significance there that it quickly lost in western Scandinavia.

Most of the runic inscriptions in eastern Sweden are explicitly Christian, with crosses as part of the design or with invocations to God and, frequently, to God's mother. In Denmark, where conversion was effected quickly by a powerful king, there was no need for individuals or families to proclaim their adherence to the new faith – it was declarations of paganism that marked the rejection of the accepted norm. There are about twenty pagan inscriptions in Denmark, but only six in Sweden, and three of these are in Västergötland, an area much influenced by the Danes. The fact that most runic monuments in Uppland are ostentatiously Christian suggests that there it was the Christian faith that broke with tradition and needed to be marked.

The claim that many of these inscriptions reflect Byzantine influence is questionable. It has been persuasively argued that the religious formulas in these inscriptions all derive from the liturgy of the western Church.⁴ There were, undoubtedly, many contacts between Scandinavia and Byzantium, or Kiev, which by the end of the tenth century had accepted Byzantine Christianity, but these did not in any significant way influence the development of the Church in Scandinavia which was, by the early eleventh century firmly linked with the western, Roman, tradition. The use of parts of the Roman liturgy in runic inscriptions, the earliest translations from Latin into a Scandinavian language, casts light on the methods of the missionaries, suggesting that Christian rituals were a vital part of the process.

The little that is known about the conversion of the Finns reinforces doubts about the influence of Orthodox Christians in Sweden. Burial rituals (but not the change from cremation to inhumation) provide the main evidence for the

4 P. Beskow, 'Runor och liturgi', in P. Beskow and R. Staats, *Nordens kristnande i europeisk perspektiv: tre uppsatser* (Skara, 1994), pp. 16–36.

process of Christian conversion in Finland. They show that Christian customs were first firmly established in the early eleventh century in the Kalanti-Laitila area in the northern part of Finland proper (Varsinais Suomi) that had long had close links with eastern Sweden. In the southern part of Finland proper, around Åbo, and inland in Tavastia pagan rituals persisted until the end of the twelfth century, and even later in eastern Finland and in Karelia. It is, however, only in Karelia that Orthodox influence, presumably from Novgorod, is manifest, but that was long after a Latin bishopric was established in Åbo, which happened by 1220 at the latest.

The runic inscriptions also show that in Scandinavia, as in other parts of Europe, women played an important role in the conversion. One stone in Uppland, erected by two brothers in memory of their parents, ends 'May God now help *her* soul well', implying that only their mother was Christian. It is significant that most of the monuments commemorating deathbed converts were erected by women. Five of the six inscriptions in Uppland in memory of men who 'died in white clothing', meaning that they had very recently been baptised, were erected by women. Monuments that refer to the building of bridges are further proof of the leading role of women in the process of conversion. Missionaries taught that to build a bridge was a meritorious act earning Divine favour. There are about 120 such inscriptions and a relatively large proportion were commissioned by, or were in memory of, women. Those commemorating women are especially significant for, whereas only one in fourteen of all inscriptions are in memory of women, a quarter of the 'bridge-stones' are.

It is noteworthy that women were responsible for the two inscriptions that refer to pilgrimages. One reads: 'Estrid had this stone raised after Östen, her husband, who went to Jerusalem and died away in Greece.' The other: 'Ingerun, Hård's daughter, had these runes carved after herself. She wanted to go east and to Jerusalem.' We do not know whether Ingerun's wish was granted, but that a Swedish woman could even plan such a pilgrimage in the eleventh century is itself remarkable. Pilgrims who returned home must have greatly enlarged knowledge of the outside world in their home regions.

Integration with Christian Europe

The main beneficiaries of the process of Christianisation that gathered pace in eleventh-century Scandinavia were kings. They gained the support of bishops and other clergy who belonged to an organisation that extended throughout most of Europe and was based on written law, with a relatively elaborate

machinery to administer it. By the year 1100, Scandinavian kings, especially in Denmark and Norway, had benefited greatly from missionaries who had experience of royal government in Christian kingdoms, especially England. Thanks to them, the authority of kings was made more effective by such innovations as written law and royal diplomas. The status of kings was, moreover, enhanced by the ideology of kingship and the rituals that the missionaries introduced. New forms of political organisation were developed in which bishops were not only royal counsellors but also effective, literate royal agents.

One of the most important results of conversion was the increasingly close contact with the papacy. Knut's visit to Rome in 1027 had little effect in Scandinavia, but fifty years later reforming popes had begun to claim direct authority there and to demand obedience to the law of the Church as they interpreted it. Between 1061 and 1100 at least thirteen letters of popes to rulers or bishops in Scandinavia are known. There were also visits to Rome by laymen as well as clergy. In 1100 a second Danish king, Erik Ejegod, visited the pope, partly to prepare for the elevation of Lund to an archbishopric, and partly to obtain papal confirmation of the canonisation of his brother, Knut, who had been assassinated in Odense in 1086, and was already recognised as a martyr in Denmark. It was to serve the shrine of this royal saint that Erik invited monks from Evesham Abbey in England. This was the beginning of a new and, before long, important network of religious communities and monastic orders that helped to bind Scandinavia ever more closely to other parts of Europe (cf. Chapter 13). The most momentous development was, however, the elevation of the see of Lund to an archbishopric by Pope Paschal II at the beginning of the twelfth century, marking a crucially important stage in the integration of Scandinavia in Christian Europe, a process in which the Church and churchmen had been the main, although not the only, agents.

Early political organisation

(a) Introductory survey

THOMAS LINDKVIST

The late Viking Age and the early Middle Ages were a period of fundamental developments in Scandinavian political history. It was then that the three Scandinavian kingdoms originated – in chronological order: Denmark, Norway and Sweden – all of them precursors of the later national states. Norse communities were also permanently established in Føroyar and Iceland. Further north-west, in Greenland, and further south – in Shetland, Orkney, on the northern Scottish mainland and its western seaboard, in the Hebrides, the Isle of Man and Ireland – other Norse communities were the results of Viking Age expansion but were not destined to survive the Middle Ages.

This was also the age when Scandinavia entered the world of script. In the Viking Age foreign written evidence starts to shed light on the activities of Scandinavians abroad, and also provides glimpses of internal Scandinavian affairs. We have seen that the Scandinavian poetry of the Viking Age, in the form of Eddic verse and skaldic poems, was preserved for generations as part of an oral tradition that was recorded in writing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These centuries were the heyday of a rich Scandinavian historical literature, dealing to a large extent with the Viking Age and the early Middle Ages (Chapter 15). But writing in the Latin alphabet had already started in the eleventh century as part of the process of Christianisation, and before the end of that century had led to the first but no longer extant recording of provincial laws in Norway. Thanks to the written evidence from the eleventh and twelfth centuries Scandinavian history can be said to emerge from the twilight of prehistory.

It should, however, be stressed that this written evidence is very scarce, partly conflicting, and often hard to interpret. Until the end of the eleventh century Scandinavian documents are conspicuous by their absence, and they are still rare in the following century. The first known is the Danish King Knud's charter in favour of the cathedral of Lund in 1085 (see Chapter 8(b)), but it is only preserved in a copy and its authenticity is disputed. The oldest

extant original document is a Danish fragment from 1135. This means that the written evidence for the formation of the three medieval Scandinavian kingdoms and the Norse island communities of the Western Ocean consists mainly of narratives.

Until about 1100 such narratives are exclusively foreign. Persons, events and conditions in Scandinavia are viewed from the outside by non-Scandinavians, for example in *The Royal Frankish Annals*, *Vita Anskarii*, *Irish Annals* and the geographical survey prefacing the Old English translation of *Orosius*. The last is exceptional in that it renders the account of the Norwegian Ohthere (Ottar) about his homeland and his travels (cf. Chapter 6), the oldest extant description of Scandinavia from the inside. The most comprehensive foreign work dealing with Scandinavian history before 1100 is Adam of Bremen's history of the archiepiscopal see of Hamburg-Bremen, written in about 1075. Adam's work should, however, be used with caution because of his bias and his meagre sources for the more distant past of Scandinavia.

The rich historical literature of medieval Scandinavia unfolded mainly after the three Scandinavian kingdoms had come to comprise most of their later territories and long after the Norse island communities of the Western Ocean had been established. History writing was particularly rich and varied in high medieval Iceland where it developed in close interplay with the far more limited Norwegian historiography. Icelandic skalds served Norwegian kings and composed poems on their deeds, and the works of Icelandic authors on Norwegian history, notably kings' sagas, were not only well received in Norway but were also partly commissioned there.

The Icelandic and Norwegian historical literature, most of it in the form of vernacular sagas, contains the bulk of the written evidence from which modern historians have tried to reconstruct the early development of political and social organisation in Norway, Iceland and the other Norse island communities of the Western Ocean. Modern accounts of the making of the Danish and Swedish kingdoms, too, have been partly based on saga evidence. Denmark did, however, develop its own Latin historiography from about 1100, whereas Sweden remained more of a literary and cultural backwater. Consequently, modern accounts of the political unification of Sweden are much more fragmentary than those concerning the parallel processes in Denmark and notably Norway.¹

Until the end of the nineteenth century Scandinavian historians found it possible to render, on the basis of what they considered to be truly 'historical'

1 P. Foote, 'Icelandic historians and the Swedish image', in G. Dahlbäck (ed.), *Snorre Sturlasson och de isländska källorna till Sveriges historia* (Stockholm, 1993), pp. 9–39.

narratives, quite detailed and coherent accounts of political events and conditions from the beginning of the Viking Age. But the early twentieth century saw a sharpening of historical criticism that has greatly reduced the confidence of historians in the historicity of the high medieval sagas and chronicles about the distant past.² The basis of this criticism has been to doubt the reliability of the oral traditions on which such narratives were based and to regard them as works coloured in various ways by the circumstances under which they originated. It is true that such principles have generally been less influential in practice than in theory. Nevertheless, it has become part of the medieval historians' craft to search for political and ideological bias in medieval historiography and to detect anachronisms and projections of contemporary conditions into a more or less unknown past. Sagas and chronicles about a distant past should not be taken at face value unless there are specific reasons for doing so.

The more radical historical criticism of the twentieth century has made students of early Scandinavian history attach increasing importance to evidence other than sagas and chronicles. Legal, social and political structures are reflected in the medieval provincial law-codes of Norway, Denmark and Sweden, and in the laws of the Icelandic 'Free State', but they too are only extant in twelfth- and thirteenth-century versions. Some of the provisions appear to be older but this is in most cases hard to establish beyond doubt. It is therefore a matter of debate how far the extant law-codes will allow retrospective interpretations.

In these circumstances it is necessary to confront the later written material with what contemporaneous evidence there is. In addition to the foreign narratives already mentioned this consists of runic inscriptions, coins, place-names and a vast array of archaeological artefacts and *in situ* antiquities. Moreover, there is a good chance that skaldic poems composed by Norwegians and Icelanders in the Viking Age and the following century, due to their strict and intricate metres (see Chapter 6), had not undergone many alterations before they were written down.

The problem of sources briefly described here³ necessitates an interdisciplinary approach to the study of early Scandinavian political and social

2 See particularly, L. Weibull, *Kritiska undersökningar i Nordens historia omkring år 1000* (Lund, 1911); H. Koht, 'Sagaernes opfatning av vor gamle historie', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 5:2 (Oslo, 1914), pp. 379–96; O. Dahl, *Norsk historieforskning i det 19. og 20. århundre* (Oslo, 1990, 4th edn), pp. 195–206, 235–43; B. Odén, *Lauritz Weibull och forskarsamhället* (Lund, 1975); K. Helle, 'Norway, 800–1200', in A. Faulkes and R. Perkins (eds.), *Viking Revaluations* (London, 1993), pp. 4–5.

3 See also the overall survey of sources for Scandinavian medieval history in B. and P. Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation* (*The Nordic Series*, 17, Minneapolis, 1993), pp. 1–26.

organisation. Different types of evidence and methodologies need to be combined in order to establish an overall picture. But it must be admitted that a picture based only on contemporaneous evidence will be fragmentary and incoherent, and that the apparent coherence found in later historical narratives may be false.

The Viking Age and early Middle Ages saw the beginning of political unification in the larger territories, leading to the creation of the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and the Free State of Iceland. Føroyar too became a separate legal and administrative entity, but on a smaller scale. In the south-west the Orkney earls and the Norse kings of Dublin and of Man and the Isles attempted to establish overlordships over more extensive territories. There are no written sources for social and political developments in Finland until the 'Age of Crusades' which started in the mid-twelfth century and led to the incorporation of Finland in the Swedish kingdom.

The early political unification was the outcome of political decisions made by individuals – and of military force. We are partly able to reconstruct this process, more or less reliably, with the help of the medieval narratives, supported by other types of evidence. It has traditionally been assumed that the political unification of the Scandinavian kingdoms was complete when they each had one king who was recognised as the head of, and controlled most of, each 'national' territory; nowadays, however, scholars stress the complexity of the unification process.

We have seen that in the Germanic Iron Age and the early Viking Age, chiefdoms and petty kingdoms existed in various parts of Scandinavia. The power of a ruler was partly based on his ability to acquire wealth by raids and pillage outside his own territory, so that a powerful position could be established and maintained and followers recruited. Plundering expeditions could also lead to the more or less permanent imposition of tribute on external territories that could not be directly controlled by a distant ruler because the means of administration were few in a mainly illiterate political culture.

Violence and plunder was not the only basis of lordship and power. Exchange of prestige products was important and control over ports of trade (*emporía*) was a significant instrument of power. Lordships were unstable and the rivalries among chiefs and petty kings hard and bitter. Some of them went voluntarily or were forced into exile in western Europe or Russia, where new lordships and social positions could be established. Others became landless Vikings. The colonisation of Iceland, mainly from western Norway, can in part, but only in part (see Chapter 8(d)), be explained in these terms. The political structure of the Icelandic community in the age of settlement, with chieftains (*goðar*) who

exercised personal but not territorial lordship, might, with caution, give some idea of the political structure of Scandinavia proper before the making of the kingdoms.

The early process of political unification involved the gradual development of overlordships; increasingly lordships were ranked into hierarchies. One important way of establishing and maintaining political power was to have subordinate allies in outer districts and distant areas. The underlords were usually local magnates, the most prominent of them were themselves chiefs or petty kings who recognised an overlord by paying tribute or supporting him in other ways. An overlord could gain greater control over external territory by putting his own agents in charge of it. The Danish circular strongholds from c. 980 (Chapters 6 and 8(b)) may have been instruments for a more direct subjection of territories by a royal overlord.

The formation of the kingdoms involved the development of a more elaborate and formalised military organisation. This was required for defensive purposes and eventually also for more advanced offensive enterprises. In all three kingdoms a naval levy – the *leding* (Danish), *leidang* (Norw.) or *ledning* (Swedish) – was put at the king's disposal; by this system the population contributed ships, men and provisions. The professional core of the royal military force was the king's retinue of men that owed him fealty and special service, his *lið* or *hirð*.

The chronology and tempo of the political unification differed from kingdom to kingdom. Danish territories, the richest and most densely populated in Scandinavia, were the first to be united into one kingdom. At a time when land divided and sea united, almost every part of the Danish realm could be easily reached by water. It was thus easier to control Denmark than the much larger and topographically divided landmasses of Norway and Sweden. Moreover, rulers of Denmark were in control of the waterways between the North and Baltic Seas, and their country faced the North Sea and the more advanced and wealthy societies of Western Europe, providing good opportunities to raid and pillage as well as to exchange goods.

In Denmark a strong Jutish kingdom existed from the eighth and into the ninth centuries. Little is known of the extent and nature of this kingdom, but at the beginning of the ninth century its rulers were overlords of Viken, the Oslofjord area of present-day Norway. It may also have controlled other Danish territories than Jylland; at least we know that geographically Denmark then included the Danish islands as well as Skåne, Halland and Bohuslän in present-day Sweden. Later in the ninth century the Jutish kingdom appears to have suffered a period of division and decline, lasting into the early tenth century.

But from about 940 the Jelling dynasty of Jylland expanded its power so that in the late tenth century it ruled most of medieval Denmark and exercised overlordship of at least part of Norway. Its conquest of England in the early eleventh century resulted in a North Sea empire which under the rule of King Knut the Great for some time included overlordship of both Norway and part of Sweden.

At that time, the establishment of separate Norwegian and Swedish kingdoms within their later, high medieval borders would probably not have seemed to be the most likely course of future events. Consolidation of Danish rule over most of southern Scandinavia, combined with an indirect overlordship that reached even further, was an alternative line of development that must have looked, and still looks, at least as natural as what eventually happened. But Knut died in 1035 without having transformed his overlordship of Norwegian and Swedish territories into more permanent direct rule, and the dissolution of his empire followed rapidly.

The breaking up of the Danish North Sea empire and the consequent weakening of the Danish kingdom made it possible for Norwegian kings to establish a more permanent rule over most of their later territory. Now for the first time they managed to control Viken effectively, and pushed the southern border of their kingdom as far south as the 'River' (Göta älv), where, later, the three Scandinavian kingdoms met.

It is true that there had been earlier tendencies towards the consolidation of a Norwegian kingdom, starting at the latest in the days of King Harald Finehair in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. But this was a kingdom whose rulers did not for long exercise direct control over much more than its core territory in the coastal districts of western Norway. Viken appears to have been generally ruled by petty kings, mostly under Danish overlordship, and the rich agricultural districts of interior Østlandet and Trøndelag were beyond the reach of the west Norwegian kings. The situation changed when the Vikings Olaf Trygvason and Olaf Haraldsson won recognition as kings in Norway in the last years of the tenth century and the early eleventh century, respectively. Their ambition was clearly to establish a new and Christian kingdom, comprising most of Norway. But their reigns were only intervals in the period of Danish domination in Scandinavia. It was only when this ended following the death of King Knut in 1035 that the ambition to bring most of Norway under royal rule was fulfilled by Olaf Haraldsson's son Magnus and his half-brother Harald Hard-ruler.

In Sweden the tendencies towards political unification came later and were weaker than in Denmark and Norway. In the years around AD 1000 the Swedish

king, Olof Skötkonung, seems to have had the same ambition to establish a Christian kingdom as his contemporary Norwegian namesakes, and he is the first king to be associated with both of the two main regions of medieval Sweden, Svealand and Götaland. But for periods it appears that he had to succumb to Danish claims of overlordship. It is not until the late twelfth century that there is evidence of a kingship that was accepted in both Götaland and Svealand and that exercised rudimentary control over both regions. Clearly it was difficult to establish effective control over the vast territories of medieval Sweden.

In the process of political and social transformation Christianity and the Church were of crucial importance (cf. Chapter 7). The establishment of Christianity to the exclusion of other beliefs among most of the populations of Scandinavia proper and Iceland is described in the narrative sources mainly as a result of political decisions. The kings or chiefs who converted and led the propagation of the new creed did not do so for religious reasons alone; Christianity and its ecclesiastical organisation were also means of enhancing their power and prestige, their control over men and land.

Little is known of the social foundations of pre-Christian religion in Scandinavia, but it appears that cultic functions were intimately connected with local social and political power. The new creed and ecclesiastical organisation then served to break down the old pagan organisation of society wherever it stood against the Christian kings, not least by undermining the position of local leaders who opposed the expansion of royal power. In Iceland, however, the leaders of the pre-Christian community, the *goðar*, were also responsible for the official conversion to Christianity which they exploited to their own advantage.

Ideologically Christianity and its clergy provided new and more effective ways of legitimising kingship. As the protector of the Church, and in the early phase also its virtual head, the king acquired an exalted position in society, professed by the clergy to be sanctioned by God in order to promote His will. The clergy were the first and for a long time the only literate royal agents in Scandinavia, in close contact with other countries and familiar with their more advanced systems of government. They consequently played an important role as counsellors and administrators. In Iceland we shall see that the proprietary church organisation, in which chieftains and well-to-do farmers were the administrators of local churches, became a strong base of secular economy and political power.

The political structures that evolved in the three kingdoms and in Iceland had some essential traits in common. There was a gradual transformation

of lordship over people into lordship over territories. In Scandinavia proper, power came increasingly to rest on the internal resources of the three kingdoms. The royal demesnes were enlarged, mainly through confiscations. The populations were put under the obligation of performing particular duties such as sustaining the king and his retinue and contributing to the naval levy. Later, the duties connected with the levy were partly or completely converted into a regular tax, and so were other duties, but to varying degrees in each of the kingdoms.

An administration with incipient tendencies towards specialisation emerged in all three kingdoms, largely within the expanded framework of the royal retinue. The judicial functions of the king and his representatives increased and were of crucial importance for the status, power and economy of the kingdom. Later, royal legislative functions became a basic element in the state formation of the high Middle Ages (see Chapter 12). The *things* were political as well as legal assemblies, and constituted important meeting places between the king and his representatives on the one hand and the local or regional élites and broader population on the other. But the relative influence of the two parties varied from kingdom to kingdom. In this and other respects the local élites of Sweden appear to have kept their influence to a higher degree and for longer than was the case in Norway and Denmark. In Norway the regional *lawthings* were obviously instrumental in paving the way for royal and ecclesiastical reforms whereas the Swedish monarchy was probably in general confronted by a stronger opposition within the framework of provincial *things*.

In so far as Iceland was a political unit in the Free State period it was because the Icelanders accepted a common body of law, and had a hierarchy of *things* with the *Althing* at its summit. It was within this framework that the *goðar* exercised their judicial and administrative functions. Power was, however, increasingly concentrated in the hands of a diminishing number of chieftains and families and was converted into territorial lordships over extensive regions. But no single chieftain had the resources to extend his rule over the whole of Iceland, and the increasingly bitter and destructive power struggle among a handful of leading chieftains and their families paved the way for the inclusion of Iceland in the Norwegian realm.

8 (b) The making of the Danish kingdom

INGE SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN

Traditionally, the two royal rune stones at Jelling (see Chapter 6) mark the beginning of Danish history. The smaller one bears the inscription 'King Gorm made this monument in honour of his wife, Tyre, the pride of Denmark'. The larger one relates that 'King Harald ordered these monuments to be made in honour of his father, Gorm, and his mother, Tyre – that Harald who won for himself all Denmark, and Norway, and made the Danes Christian'.¹

Exact dating of runes is rarely possible, but on the basis of the royal names, known from foreign written sources, the Jelling inscriptions have been dated to the second half of the tenth century. They present the first two generations of the royal dynasty that has reigned in Denmark ever since. In the ninth and tenth centuries the title of *konungr* (king) could be used by several petty rulers at the same time but on the Jelling stone it is reserved for the single ruler of the whole of Denmark and at least part of Norway.

In the country itself the name of Denmark (*tanmaurk*, modern Danish *Danmark*) first occurs on the Jelling stones. However, *Denamearc* was already known to the Norwegian magnate Ohthere (Ottar) who visited King Alfred in England in about 890, and shortly afterwards Abbot Regino of Prüm (d. 915) mentions the name of *Denimerca* in his *Chronica*. The name consists of two parts: 'Dan' designates the people, the Danes (OD *danir*), whereas 'mark' has several meanings. One of them, 'borderland', would seem to fit the situation of the country at that time, though it is uncertain which border is meant. The border with Sweden has been suggested, from which the territory of Denmark after various conquests would extend to comprise the entire medieval Danish

¹ The following are relevant to the whole of this chapter: I. Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Oldtid og Vikingetid', in A. E. Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 1 (København, 1977), pp. 15–201 with a full bibliography; A. E. Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', in Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 1, pp. 211–399 with a full bibliography; P. Sawyer, *Da Danmark blev Danmark* (O. Olsen, (ed.), *Politiken og Gyldendals Danmarkshistorie*, 3, København, 1989); O. Fenger, *Kirker rejses alle vegne* (Olsen, *Politiken*, 4, 1989).

realm. This theory is based on the sixth-century narrative of Jordanes, historian of the Goths, who believed that the Danes migrated from Sweden to settle in the Danish islands. But Jordanes does not use the name Denmark. A more likely theory focuses on the fact that the realm of the Danes in about 800 bordered on that of the Franks. The Franks used the word 'mark' to denote a border region that needed particular watching. Thus, the name of Denmark would have its origin in the designation of the area along the river Eider at the base of Jylland, well known to the Franks from the end of the eighth century.

The geographic extent of Denmark is indicated by Ohthere's and Wulfstan's descriptions of their voyages in Scandinavia, as recorded in the Old English translation of *Orosius*.² Here the three Scandinavian countries – Denmark, Norway (*Norðweg*) and Sweden (*Sweoland*) – are each mentioned. Denmark consisted of the present-day Danish territories except for the island of Bornholm. It also comprised the southern part of Schleswig as far as the river Eider together with Skåne and Halland in present-day southern Sweden, but not Blekinge which according to Wulfstan belonged to the Swedes. Furthermore, according to Ohthere, Bohuslän in present-day western Sweden and at least part of Viken or the Oslofjord area in present-day Norway belonged to Denmark. At the end of the ninth century, then, Denmark comprised all areas bordering on the Kattegat, that is, the central part of southern Scandinavia. What do we know of the origins of this conglomeration of territories and of its further history throughout the rest of the Viking Age and the early Scandinavian Middle Ages?

Sources

From before 1100 there is very little indigenous written evidence for the history of Denmark, but occasionally foreign writings throw light on Danish events. From about 800 the contemporaneous *Royal Frankish Annals*³ contain an annual item on the relations between the Frankish kingdom and Danish kings. The first group of annals come to an end in the year 829. After that, as a consequence of the disruption of the Frankish empire, somewhat differing versions take over. The German annals, written in Fulda, continue until 901. From the same period there are also other foreign historical works touching on Danish

2 N. Lund (ed.), *Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred: the Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan* (York, 1984).

3 *Annales regni Francorum*, *Annales Bertiniani* and *Annales Fuldenses* are published with a German translation and commentary in R. Rau (ed.), *Quellen zur Karolingischen Reichsgeschichte*, 1–3 (Darmstadt, 1968–9).

history; the most important is Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*, written in about 875.⁴ Apart from reports on Danish Vikings in western Europe (see Chapter 5), very little is known of Danish history during the last decades of the ninth century.

The eleventh-century Danish and English kings Sven Forkbeard, Knut and Hardeknut are dealt with in a chronicle called *Encomium Emmae* or *Gesta Cnutonis Regis*.⁵ It was written by a monk of St Omer in Flanders in about 1040 with the purpose of supporting Hardeknut as king of England. The author also favours Sven in his revolt against his father, the Harald of the larger Jelling stone, later nicknamed 'Bluetooth'.

In contrast to the author of *Encomium Emmae*, Adam of Bremen in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*,⁶ written in about 1075, sides with Harald against Sven. Adam's work is the most important foreign narrative dealing with early Danish and other Scandinavian history. One of his informants was the Danish king Sven Estridsen who died in 1074. Adam wanted to remind the newly appointed archbishop, Liemar, of the fact that mission among the Slavs and the Scandinavians was the reason why the diocese of Hamburg-Bremen was founded, and that this task should not be neglected in favour of royal affairs as it had been under his predecessor.⁷ In using Adam's work it is important to keep in mind his bias and his meagre sources for the early history of Scandinavia. His first two books, covering the period from about 800 to 1043, should be approached with particular caution.

No Scandinavian narratives are known until about 1100 when the killing of St Knud (in 1086) caused the writing of the earliest extant Danish texts. English clerics from the monastery of St Alban in Odense composed a *Tabula* on the elevation of Knud's coffin in 1095. Another text, *Passio*, derives from his canonisation in 1101. This is a description of Knud's martyrdom to be used liturgically in connection with his masses. In the years 1111–17 an English Benedictine, Ailnoth, composed the first substantial account of the martyrdom of St Knud, *Gesta Swenomagni regis et filiorum eius et passio gloriosissimi Canuti*

4 Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* and Adam of Bremen's history of the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen are published with a German translation and commentary in W. Trillmich (ed.), *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches* (Darmstadt, 1968).

5 M. Cl. Gertz (ed.), *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii aevi*, 2 (København, 1922), pp. 375–426; A. Campbell (ed.), *Encomium Emmae reginae* (Royal Historical Society, Camden, 3rd ser. 72, London, 1949).

6 See footnote 4.

7 Aa. Trommer, 'Komposition und Tendenz in der hamburgischen Kirchengeschichte Adam von Bremens', *Classica et mediaevalia*, 18 (1957), pp. 207–57.

regis et martyris.⁸ A little more than twenty years later, probably in the 1140s, the *Roskilde Chronicle* was written. It covers the period from AD 826 to 1140/45, and was continued up to 1157.⁹ The chronicle concentrates on the relations between the kings, some of whom were legendary, and the church. It is based on Adam of Bremen's history of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen to whose church province Scandinavia belonged until 1104, but the author of the Chronicle makes alterations in order to stress that Danish Christianity dated back to King Harald Klak's baptism in 826.¹⁰ The last part of the chronicle is considered to be more trustworthy than the later histories of Sven Aggesen and Saxo (see Chapter 12(c)), although nobody can deny its bias.

Since medieval Danish history writing is late and the contemporaneous works are meagre and biased, great importance must be attached to other types of evidence, archaeological as well as written. To the latter belong *runic inscriptions*. The problem with these inscriptions is that they can only be dated approximately in cases where a person or an event is mentioned, such as in the case of the Jelling stones. In most cases one must resort to rough linguistic and typological dating. Such dating of Danish inscriptions is uncertain in that it is to a large extent based on the Jelling runes.

Important Danish events and kings are sometimes praised in Icelandic *skaldic poems* which may have been composed shortly after the events they relate and preserved fairly well orally because of their strict and complicated prosody. But the fact remains that they have only been preserved in sagas several hundred years younger.

For the period from the end of the eighth century to about 1100, coins, notably in hoards, are important evidence. Most coins from the Viking Age are foreign, such as Islamic coins which reflect trade and other connections with the Caliphate in the ninth and tenth centuries. Only a small number of Scandinavian Viking Age coins are known, and up to about 995 they are without inscriptions. After that coins stamped with the name (and sometimes the image) of a king are found. They can be dated approximately and the mints and mintmasters can be located. In the first part of the eleventh century Danish coins imitate English ones; this was an effect of King Knut's North

8 These hagiographical texts are published in M. Cl. Gertz (ed.), *Vitae Danorum sanctorum*, 1 (København, 1908).

9 M. Cl. Gertz, (ed), *Scriptores minores historiae Danicæ mediæ ævi*, 1 (København, 1918), pp. 3–33.

10 L. Hemmingsen, *By Words of Mouth: The Origin of Danish Legendary History*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (København, 1996).

Sea empire. But even more German coins were imported until minting of domestic coinage began to expand in the mid-eleventh century. A few decades later only coins with the name of the ruling native king were officially accepted in Denmark.¹¹

Archaeology has become an increasingly important source for the study of the earliest political history of Denmark. New procedures have been developed, such as the excavation of large areas of settlement and improved dating techniques, notably dendrochronology. Dendrochronology has, for instance, made it possible to date King Gorm's original burial chamber to 958, and exact dates have been determined for the fortification of Danevirke, the Kanhave canal and the early development of the town of Ribe.

Danish history before 950

In his *History of the Franks* from the last quarter of the sixth century Gregory of Tours mentions a Danish king by the name of Chalochillaich who raided the Frankish coast shortly after 500. The attack was repelled and the king slain. Nothing is known of his reign or realm in Denmark. Two hundred years later an English missionary, Willibrord, tried to convert a king of the Danes called Ongendus.¹² Nothing came of this, but at the same time, in the first part of the eighth century, the town of Ribe started to develop, apparently as an emporium where cattle were exchanged for various handmade objects produced in workshops north of the river Ribeå.¹³

Parallel with the earliest urban-like activity in Ribe, a rampart north of the river Eider, originally constructed in the sixth century, was strengthened with a huge oak-timbered palisade. This reinforcement of the so-called *Danevirke* ('fortification of the Danes') has been dated dendrochronologically to 737.¹⁴ It is tempting to see King Ongendus, or Angantyr in the Nordic language, as the ruler of the southern part of Jylland where Ribe and Danevirke were established. A power of royal dimensions must be considered a *sine qua non* for building activity on that scale.

A third feat of engineering belongs to the same years. In 726 the Kanhave canal was dug across the island of Samsø, centrally situated between Jylland

11 J. Steen Jensen (ed.), *Tusindtallets danske mønter: Danish Coins from the Eleventh Century in The Royal Collections of Coins and Medals* (København, 1995).

12 Alcuin, 'De Vita S. Willibrordi', in Ph. Jaffé (ed.), *Monumenta Alcuiniana*, Bibl. VI (Berlin, 1873), pp. 47–8.

13 M. Bencard (ed.), *Ribe excavations 1970–76*, 1–4 (Ribe, 1976–91).

14 H. Hellmuth Andersen et al., *Danevirke*, 1–2 (*Jysk Arkæologisk Selskabs Skrifter*, 13, 1976).

and Sjælland.¹⁵ Whoever was in control of this canal was also able to observe and to some extent control traffic on both sides of Samsø, to and from the Danish Belts. So many important works from the same time would seem to indicate that a single Danish king ruled a large part of medieval Denmark. However, even as late as the ninth century there is no clear indication of royal activity outside southern Jylland.

According to the *Royal Frankish Annals*, Charlemagne fought a war with Godfred, the king of the Danes. In 808 Godfred had some traders moved from Reric, probably at the inlet of Kiel, to the fjord of Schleswig (Schlei); at the same time he ordered a fortification to be built along the frontier from the Baltic to the North Sea. Until about twenty years ago, when archaeologists excavated the much older rampart mentioned above, this was believed to have been the origin of Danevirke.

In 810 Godfred was murdered by one of his retainers, and in the following year his nephew and successor, Hemming, made a treaty with Charlemagne. Twelve high-born Franks and twelve Danes met in the neighbourhood of the Eider and swore on their swords to keep the peace. Among the Danish participants were two of Hemming's brothers, and also a person by the name of Osfrid of Skåne, but the fact that the king had a man from Skåne among his most distinguished retainers cannot be taken as proof that Hemming and his successors governed the whole of Denmark.

In the following years there was internal fighting between different branches of Godfred's kin. A new meeting with the Franks in 813 was postponed because two Danish kings went to Vestfold on the western side of Oslofjord to subdue an uprising. When they returned to Jylland a tremendous battle was fought with the sons of Godfred. In 815 the sons of Godfred with 200 ships withdrew in the face of a Frankish attack; eventually the Franks abandoned their pursuit and returned to the emperor with forty hostages. Twelve years later, Horik, a son of Godfred, became king of the Danes. In *Vita Anskarii* Rimbart claims that Horik was the first king to rule all Danes but the truth of that is impossible to assess. We simply do not know how much of Denmark he ruled.

In 826 another Danish king, Harald Klak, tried to obtain the support of Emperor Louis the Pious. Together with his household Harald was baptised in Mainz and sent back together with the missionary Anskar (see Chapter 7).

¹⁵ A. Nørregaard Jørgensen, 'Nye undersøgelser af Kanhavekanalen på Samsø', *Marinarkæologisk Nyhedsbrev fra Roskilde* (Roskilde, 1995), pp. 9–15. A roughly contemporary underwater fortification may be an extension of Danevirke; see W. Kramer, 'Ein hölzernes Sperrwerk in der grossen Breite der Schlei als Teil des Danewerk-Baues von 737 n.Chr.Geb.', *Archäologische Nachrichten aus Schleswig-Holstein*, Heft 3 (Schleswig, 1992).

However, it appears that it was not Harald but King Horik with whom Anskar had to negotiate in order to be able to preach among the Danes. In 873 the *Fulda Annals* mention negotiations between the German king and two Danish kings; these encounters seem to have taken place in the border district between the Danes and the Saxons.

In the decades around 900 Danish history is plunged in darkness. Adam of Bremen later claimed to know that a Swedish dynasty settled at Hedeby and ruled the area for three generations. The extent of their realm has been the object of much discussion but their presence is confirmed by two rune stones from the first quarter of the tenth century. The inscriptions mention the royal names of Gnupa and his son Sigtrygg and the stones were raised by Gnupa's wife, Asfrid, daughter of Odinkar. Odinkar was also the name of a wealthy bishop of Ribe in the early eleventh century and it is possible that Asfrid belonged to a powerful Jutish family whereas the predecessor and probable ancestor of Gnupa and Sigtrygg, Oluf, is described by Adam as a Swedish prince. In his *Res Saxonum Gestae* from 970 Widukind of Korvey reports that the German king Henry I fought the Danes in 934, forcing 'Chnuba' (Gnupa) to be baptised.¹⁶ Whatever the extent of the realm of these kings they were, according to Adam, succeeded by King Gorm, but the circumstances and chronology of the take-over are confusing. Suffice it to say that by about 940 the Jelling dynasty had prevailed, at least in southern Jylland. According to Adam of Bremen, Gorm and his son Harald had an encounter with the archbishop of Bremen, apparently in 936.

The dating of Gorm's death depends on the dating of the burial chamber in the northern mound at Jelling, regarded as having been built for him. By use of dendrochronology it has been established that the timber of the chamber was cut in 958 (cf. Chapter 6). Harald seems to have been baptised in about 965. However, three Danish bishops are mentioned in the statutes of a synod at Ingelheim in Germany as early as 948 (cf. Chapter 7). They were subordinated to the archiepiscopal see of Hamburg-Bremen which again belonged to the *Reichskirche* of King Otto I. The Christianisation of Denmark through Harald Bluetooth was probably the consequence of German predominance over Denmark. Otto issued a letter of immunity to the Danish clergy in 965, as did also his grandson Otto III in 988. The documents of 948, 965 and 988 contain the first mentions of Danish urban centres: Schleswig, Ribe and Århus in 948, and Odense in 988.

¹⁶ Widukind's work has been published with a German translation and commentary in A. Bauer and R. Rau (eds.), *Quellen zur Geschichte der sächsischen Kaiserzeit* (Darmstadt, 1971).

By and large there appears to have been a tendency towards political unification of Denmark throughout the Viking Age but royal sovereignty over the entire medieval Denmark cannot be substantiated until the latest part of that period. At first, kings seem to have ruled over southern Jylland, then over Fyn and the entire peninsula, to which was finally added Sjælland and Skåne. As to the functions of the ninth-century Jutish king it can be seen that he negotiated with foreign powers. Though he had not adopted Christianity he furnished missionaries with sites for the building of churches at Hedeby and Ribe. Corresponding royal control at Århus has been dated to shortly before 900, at a time when Danish royal power appears to have been weak.¹⁷

The North Sea empire

Whatever the rune carver of the larger Jelling stone had in mind when he declared that King Harald Bluetooth 'won all Denmark' this deed included the building of four large-scale, circular strongholds placed at strategic positions close to either the Kattegat or the Limfjord (cf. Chapter 6). These forts are known as Fyrkat and Aggersborg in northern Jylland, Nonnebakken in Odense, and Trelleborg in Sjælland; they were all excavated in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁸ They are commonly thought to have been commissioned by one person, presumably the king. Their function is disputed, but they were definitely strong enough to control the surrounding areas and the neighbouring waterways and may thus have been instruments for the subjection of the entire country. Trelleborg in Sjælland has been dated dendrochronologically to 981. In the other three there was not enough surviving wood to make possible such exact dating but the close similarity between all four of them indicates that they were built much at the same time. However, Harald Bluetooth seems to have started from southern Jylland, and his conquest probably progressed from west to east. The recently found traces of a circular structure in Trälleborg at the southeast corner of Skåne may reflect some of Harald's influence there as well.

Thietmar of Merseburg refers to encounters between Saxons and Danes at Danevirke in 974. A Danish fortification was conquered by the Saxons

17 H. Hellmuth Andersen, P. J. Crabb and H. J. Madsen, *Århus Sønder vold. En byhistorisk undersøgelse* (Jysk Arkæologisk Selskabs Skrifter, 9, 1971).

18 P. Nørlund, *Trelleborg* (København, 1948); O. Olsen, E. Roesdahl and H. Schmidt, *Fyrkat*, 1–2 (København, 1976); R. Skovmand et al. (eds.), *Aggersborg i 1000 år* (København, 1980); B. Jacobsson, 'Utgrävningen av borgen Trelleborg, Skåne', in G. Fellows-Jensen and N. Lund (eds.), *Fjortende tværfaglige vikingesymposium* (København, 1995), pp 12–22.

but reconquered by the Danish king in 983.¹⁹ The identification of the king mentioned depends on the date of Harald Bluetooth's death. Towards the end of his life he was, according to Adam of Bremen, faced with a revolt led by his son, Sven Forkbeard. Harald was defeated and took refuge in the Slavonic town of Jumne, in spite of the fact that the population there was heathen. He died there but his body was brought back to Denmark and buried in the Trinity Church in Roskilde which he had built himself. *Encomium Emmae* has it that the civil war was started by Harald because he was envious of Sven's popularity, and that the war came to an end when Harald fled to the Slavs among whom he died, but his funeral is not mentioned. After Sven's death in England in 1014, his body was transferred to a port in Denmark and buried in a monastery dedicated to the Trinity, which he had built.

In spite of their opposite biases – Adam regarding Sven as a rebel whereas the *Encomiast* takes Sven's side – the two authors agree on the civil war and Harald's death among the Slavs. It is, however, uncertain whether it was Harald or Sven who built the church or monastery dedicated to the Trinity, but since the *Encomiast* seems to know less about Denmark than Adam, it was probably Harald. Although the date of Harald's death is uncertain, it was most likely in 986, in which case he was the king who fought the Saxons in 983.

Sven Forkbeard's Viking raids on England may have started in 991, as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* mentions a raid in which the later Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason took part (cf. Chapter 5). Sven is not named then, but in 994 he raided England together with Olaf, and returned to England several times later. The English king Æthelred tried to buy him off with great sums of money, but in vain. In 1013 Sven conquered England, but a few months later, in 1014, he died. Sven was successful in England because he had been able to regain the rule of Denmark and obtain a leading position in Scandinavia. A determining factor was a battle in 1000 (or 999) when Sven fought together with the Swedish king Olof Skötkonung, probably already his man, against Olaf Tryggvason who had now become king of Norway. The location of this sea battle has been much discussed among modern historians. According to Adam it took place in Öresund 'where kings used to fight' whereas the Icelandic sources place it at the isle of 'Svoldr' near the Slavonic coast. At any rate, King Olaf was killed and two Norwegian earls were installed by Sven to rule Norway.²⁰

19 Thietmar's *Chronica* is published with a German translation and commentary in W. Trillmich, (ed.), *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 9 (Darmstadt, 1966).

20 S. Ellehøj, 'Olav Tryggvesons fald og Venderne', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 11: 4 (København, 1953–6), pp. 1–51.

After the death of Sven Forkbeard his eldest son, Harald, took over the government of Denmark. In England the situation was precarious for the Danes and Sven's younger son, Knut, had to return home for reinforcements. In 1016 his rival, the Anglo-Saxon king Edmund Ironside, died and Knut married his mother, Emma; their son was christened Hardeknut, a Danish name. In Norway a new Viking king, Olaf Haraldsson, had prevailed. He defeated one of the two ruling earls; the other was called to England to assist Knut in the subjection of that country. Olaf ruled Norway for twelve years.

Like other Scandinavian rulers Knut was surrounded by a retinue called *hirð* or *lið*. Its constitution is known through the Danish law of *Vederlagen*, preserved in three versions. The two oldest were put into writing in the late twelfth century by the historians Sven Aggesen and Saxo respectively. A *lið* was no new institution at the time of Knut; runic inscriptions bear witness to the fact that Viking chieftains had retinues. The number of men in a *lið* would necessarily vary but fifty men was considered a large *lið*. Between the leader and his men there was a contractual relationship to be renewed or terminated by either side at the time of Yule. Some of the men had special tasks in addition to their main obligation of military service for the king. A retainer might for instance be the king's deputy in a district, his *ombudsmand*. But sources are scant and Sven Aggesen's and Saxo's renderings of *Vederlagen* could just as well express wishful longing for the discipline of the past.

Much more is known of Knut's English reign than of his rule in Denmark but an institution such as the English earldom may have been influenced by Scandinavian customs. Knut appointed earls who ruled parts of his kingdom, four in England and two in Norway, whereas only one is known in Denmark, a man of uncertain extraction by the name of Ulf. He was married to Knut's sister, Estrid. In a battle at the mouth of the river of Helgeå in Skåne (or Uppland, see Chapter 8(e)) in 1026 the Norwegian and Swedish kings joined forces against Knut. According to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* the Swedes had control of the battlefield whereas skaldic poems proclaim Knut victorious. However, his enemies were unable to stem his growing influence in Scandinavia. He was successful in supporting the opposition against King Olaf Haraldsson in Norway. In Denmark Ulf was charged with treason and killed at Knut's request. The king had to do penance by paying a large sum of wergeld to his sister who used the money to build a stone church in Roskilde.

Owing to the nature of extant sources Knut's relations with the Church are the best-known aspect of his Danish rule. In the face of protests from the see of Hamburg-Bremen he appointed several English bishops. The English

influence on the Danish church is reflected in the vocabulary of the latter which is partly of Anglo-Saxon origin.

Other transactions helped to strengthen Knut's position: during a pilgrimage to Rome he succeeded in arranging a marriage between his daughter, Gunhild, and the son of the German emperor. His last victory was won in his absence. When Olaf Haraldsson tried to regain his Norwegian realm after having been expelled in 1028, Norwegian magnates in alliance with Knut met him in the battle of Stiklestad near Trondheim in 1030. Olaf was killed and Knut had his son Sven installed as ruler of Norway under the tutelage of his English mother Ælfgifu (ON *Álfifa*). This was an unpopular arrangement ending in the expulsion of Sven and his mother from Norway and the ascension to the throne of Olaf's young son Magnus in 1035 (see Chapter 8(c)).

The change of power in Norway may have occurred before Knut's death in 1035. With his death, however, it became clear how loosely Knut's North Sea empire had been organised. At first his sons took over his kingdoms but when the youngest of them, Hardeknut, suddenly died in 1042, an heir of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty, Edward the Confessor, became king of England. This marked the end of the North Sea empire. Twice, in 1069 and 1086, Danish kings attempted to reconquer England, but in vain.

Tradition has it that there was an agreement between Hardeknut and the Norwegian king Magnus Olafsson that the survivor was to rule both countries.²¹ At any rate, Magnus lived five years longer than Hardeknut and succeeded him on the Danish throne. By defeating the Slavs he won a place of his own in Danish history. After his death there was incessant fighting between his two successors, King Harald Hard-ruler of Norway and the Danish king Sven Estridsen, Knut the Great's nephew. The Norwegian frontier was now pushed south to the Göta river and the three later Scandinavian kingdoms began to emerge from the aftermath of the North Sea empire.

The early medieval Danish kingdom

The main source for this period in Danish history is Adam of Bremen and it is therefore important to recognise that his accounts tend more to the ecclesiastical than the secular. Following the constant warring between the Danish and Norwegian kings which lasted until 1064, Sven Estridsen managed to take control of the situation in Denmark. The country was divided into eight

²¹ Adam of Bremen (II, 78) tells of a similar agreement between the English king Edward the Confessor and Sven Estridsen.

dioceses, all except one with urban sees. Beside the old sees of Schleswig, Ribe, Århus and Odense, Roskilde and Lund had cathedrals by about the year 1000. By 1060, at the latest, both Viborg and the district of Vendsyssel in northern Jylland had their own sees. Skåne for a short while had two cathedrals, one at Dalby in addition to that of Lund.

Sven also wanted to create a Scandinavian church province separate from that of Hamburg-Bremen but this did not come about until 1104 when the archiepiscopal see of Lund was finally established (cf. Chapter 7). Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen, Sven's contemporary, was understandably opposed to relinquishing the largest part of his province, and claimed the right to continue as the *primas* of the Scandinavian churches. However, since he was on the imperial side in the antagonism between the German emperor and the pope, this was denied him. The situation changed when separate Norwegian and Swedish archbishoprics were established in the mid-twelfth century. The Danish archbishop Eskil (like his next two successors) was now allowed to use the title of *primas* of Sweden, which gave him the right to appoint the Swedish archbishop.

Sven Estridsen has been accused of having a dissolute character. His several children had different mothers, and he had no son by the woman to whom he was married. Nevertheless, the next five Danish kings were all his sons. In his *Gesta Danorum* from about 1200 Saxo asserts that kings should be acclaimed at the four provincial Danish *things*. This was probably a much older procedure which implied great risk of disagreement when there was more than one claimant.

The fraternal order of succession among Sven's sons appears to have been according to age. The first, Harald Hen, reigned from 1074 to 1080. He is reported to have issued laws, and his queen, Margrethe, is praised by the author of the *Roskilde Chronicle* as a rich donator to the cathedral of Roskilde. A letter from Pope Gregory VII urges Harald to follow in his father's footsteps by reinforcing the Church and protecting the weak: women, clerics and foreigners. The two latter groups were more or less identical.²² Such a letter was a response on the part of the papal curia to complaints from groups within Danish society but it is impossible to assess the possible abuses which had caused the complaints.

Knud, the successor of Harald Hen, ended his life a martyr. After having been hunted through Jylland by a rebellious crowd he was killed in the church

22 C. Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus: Regnum og sacerdotium i Danmark 1050–1170* (København, 1982), pp. 111–22.

of St Alban in Odense in 1086. The cause of the revolt is one of the great issues in modern Danish historiography.²³ The texts written to support the canonisation of Knud express opinions quite opposite to those of the *Roskilde Chronicle*. The hagiographic writings of Odense attach great importance to the fact that Knud had to give up his plan of a military expedition to England because the army refused to wait for his arrival at the meeting place in the Limfjord. According to the *Roskilde Chronicle* the rebellion was caused by a new and unprecedented law called *nefgjeld*, a sort of poll tax. The delay at the beginning of the war is said to have been due to the fact that Knud found his brother Oluf deeply involved in high treason. Knud took Oluf prisoner and sent him to his father-in-law, the count of Flanders. The later Icelandic *Knytlinga saga* relates that Oluf was released from prison to succeed Knud as king of Denmark.

During Oluf's reign (1086–95) there was a failure of crops in Denmark as well as in other parts of Europe. In the Danish hagiographical texts this was represented as divine punishment for the murder of Knud. Knud's canonisation is justified by his death as a martyr and by the miracles occurring at his tomb. The latest of these texts is Ailnoth's chronicle, dedicated to Sven Estridsen's youngest son, Niels (1104–34), who was also the last of his five reigning sons. Ailnoth urges Niels to imitate Knud as the protector of the Church, notably in Odense where the cult of the saint was by then well established.

King Niels, who succeeded his brother Erik Ejegod (1095–1103), minted a coin with the legend *Pax Portus* (peace of the port or the town). We do not know in what way this peace was to be observed but the idea would match the *Roskilde Chronicle's* characterisation of Niels: 'Kind and straightforward, by no means a ruler'.²⁴ By the standards of the time this was hardly praise. The description may refer to what happened in 1124 when Niels was unable to prevent a revolt against the clerics of Sjælland. Nor did he interfere when, in January 1131, his son Magnus killed his own cousin, Knud Lavard, son of King Erik Ejegod.

Social and political organisation in the eleventh century

By the mid-eleventh century the Viking era of quick raids and brief conquests was definitely over. With relations between kingdoms and principalities

²³ Hemmingsen, *By Words of Mouth*.

²⁴ Gertz, *Scriptores minores*, 1, p. 25: *virum mansuetum et simplicem, minime rectorem*.

being regulated more and more through diplomacy and wars, it is important to turn now to the political and social organisation of eleventh-century Denmark.

The mainstay of the economy was of course agriculture (see Chapter 10). Agrarian settlement was to a large extent organised in villages which, according to archaeological evidence, were continually relocated within their separate districts throughout the first millennium AD until they found their permanent place, probably in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when churches were built in many of them. This new stability should not be underestimated. Many new villages were also established and older ones enlarged between the eighth and thirteenth centuries as supported by archaeological evidence and topographical names. A large number of the new villages bore names ending in *-torp* (cf. German *Dorf*); other names had the suffixes of *-bølle* or *-toft*.

Village names ending in *-toft* are particularly interesting. As an appellative the word denotes the enclosed messuage of a farmstead on the village site. This unit was the key element in calculating the share of the farm in the common field and its obligations. But the word also had another meaning: the seat of an oarsman in a warship. This may indicate a connection between the organisation of the village and that of the naval levy, the *leding* (OD *lethang*).

A kind of land registration based on a unit called *bol* seems to be very old. Originally, *bol* may have meant as much land as was needed for a household. This would vary from one village to another. *Bol*-assessments occur in the earliest Danish record, St Knud's charter of 1085 in favour of Lund cathedral.²⁵

St Knud's charter transferred large landed estates to the church of Lund and states the number of *bol* in each village that were included in the gift. In Sjælland the villages are described as being in administrative districts called *herreder* (sing. *herred*, OD *hæreth*) whereas no *herred* is mentioned in Skåne. Royal rights connected with the lands in question were transferred to the dean and brothers of the cathedral, but with three notable exceptions: if a man was outlawed he would have to buy his peace from the king; if a man avoided the *leding* he was to pay a fine to the king; and the king reserved the right to take horses for his own use while visiting the various districts.

The charter also reveals that the king possessed many estates, some of them acquired through 'buyings of peace'. Another source of income were the annual dues from tenements in the towns of Lomma, Helsingborg and Lund. The king's control of these towns rested in his ownership of the town land; people could hold sites on payment of an annual fee. Several towns

²⁵ S. Skansjö and H. Sundström, *Gåvobrevet 1085* (Lund, 1988).

had royal residences and mints; eleventh-century coins were struck in urban centres such as Lund, Roskilde, Odense, Slagelse, Ringsted and Viborg. It was from these and other towns that the king was able to control a large part of the country.

Exactly when the villages were divided into *herreder* is uncertain. St Knud's charter has been used to support the opinion that the *herred* had at that time only been introduced in Sjælland, not in Skåne.²⁶ At any rate, by the thirteenth century there were *herreder* all over Denmark. The function of this unit has been the subject of much debate. In the high Middle Ages it was an administrative and judicial district. The Old Danish word *hæreth* is a compound of *hær* (army) and *rath* (riding on horseback) which suggests a military origin. There is, however, no contradiction between the military and the administrative and judicial functions. Under royal rule the entire country would have had to have been organised to ensure general participation in defence. A different division into *sysler* (sing. *sysSEL*), which were larger than the *herreder*, is only known in Jylland. The age of this unit is also uncertain but in the high Middle Ages a *sysSEL* was an area for a special type of jurisdiction (cf. ON *sýsla*, Chapter 8(c)).

The royal rights reserved in Knud's charter give important information on the character of eleventh-century royal rule: the king guaranteed the peace of the country in return for considerable payments when the peace was broken. The fines mentioned in the charter are high; their purpose was obviously to have a deterrent effect.

The king's right to fines for neglecting summons to serve in the *leding* confirms that he was in command of the naval defence. How and when the *leding* originated is uncertain, nor do we know the full extent of the system until the Danish provincial laws were put into writing in the thirteenth century. At that time the country was divided into *skipæn*, from one to four in each *herred*, and each *skipæn* was again divided into a number of *havner* (sing. *havne*). Every *skipæn* would supply one ship, every *havne* one man and his personal provisions. The kings tried to exercise their right to supreme command of the *leding* but even when the system functioned at its best, in the latter half of the twelfth and in the early thirteenth centuries, 'the Age of the Valdemars', there are several stories of defections. The revolt against St Knud in 1086 may have been the earliest example.

It should be stressed that a great part of the Danish population was not included in the *leding* system. Thus, only landowners of some substance took

²⁶ Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', p. 254.

part. Even the right to buy one's peace was reserved for the upper strata. It has been said of the European feudal society that inferior persons could implore a saint to punish unjust magnates but no justice could be enforced by law.²⁷ The majority of the people sought protection within their kin and households. These were the social conditions under which the early political unification of Denmark progressed.

²⁷ M. Gelting: 'Loven i de europæiske feudalsamfund', in O. Fenger and Chr. R. Jansen (eds.), *Jyske lov 750 år* (Viborg, 1991), pp. 26–36.

8 (c) The early unification of Norway

CLAUS KRAG

The political history of Norway in the Viking Age and the early Scandinavian Middle Ages has been dominated by one great theme, the political unification (Norw. *rikssamling*) of the different parts of the country into one kingdom. With this as their perspective Norwegian historians have been working on the period's history for more than 150 years.¹ Most of them have agreed that the unification process did not gain real momentum until the beginning of the eleventh century. Already in the 1850s P. A. Munch (1810–63), one of the founding fathers of modern Norwegian historiography, maintained that 'a new chapter of Norwegian history' could begin only 'after the complete Christianisation and the elimination of the last remnants of Danish rule in Norway'.²

At the same time many historians have regarded events both of the ninth and tenth centuries as being decisive for the political consolidation of Norwegian territory. In the social development of the Viking Age, or even earlier periods, they have seen certain determining factors at work which made the unification of Norway natural or almost inevitable. Accordingly the historians of the last two generations have generally laid less stress on historical events and described the unification primarily as a 'social process'. This has implied a deterministic view that is not totally misleading for the period after 1035 when strong forces were working in the same direction. But in the preceding period a wide range of possibilities were open and determinism tends to obscure the fact that for a long time Danish kings made their presence felt in south Norway (see Chapter 8(c)). In dealing with ninth- or tenth-century history one should not let oneself be influenced by the later national borders of Scandinavia.

1 P. S. Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge og kristningen av landet 800–1130* (K. Mykland et al. (eds.), *Handbok i Norges historie*, 2, Bergen, 1977); O. Dahl, *Norsk historieforskning i det 19. og 20. århundre* (Oslo, 1990, 4th edn), pp. 43–75, 156–79, 195–222, 229–56.

2 P. A. Munch, *Det norske Folkes Historie*, 1:1 (Christiania, 1852), pp. 459–60.

Working within their different national traditions, Scandinavian historians have not been careful enough in this respect.

The description of Norwegian political unification as a prolonged and almost inevitable process, carried forward by inherent dynamics that were working when not hindered by special circumstances, has also to do with the character of the source material. The sagas and chronicles of Norwegian kings that were put into writing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries consider Harald Halfdansson *hárfagri* (Finehair) as the first sole ruler – *einvaldskonungr* – of Norway who united ‘all the land between Finnmark and the River’ (Göta älv).³ In spite of the saga writers’ admission that Harald’s kingdom disintegrated after his death they let the history of a separate Norwegian kingdom originate with him and endorsed the idea that this kingdom was the hereditary possession of Harald’s descendants, their *óðal* or ‘family property’. Thus, later kings such as Olaf Tryggvason, Olaf Haraldsson, and Harald Sigurdsson *harðráði* (Hard-ruler, the real founder of the later dynasty) were claimed as descendants of the first Harald, which they almost certainly were not.⁴

This long dynastic line was to become a keynote not only of the saga tradition but also of modern Norwegian historiography. Its original effect, and probably also the intention behind it, was to provide the ruling dynasty of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with a distinguished past as well as firm historical ties with the country.⁵ This was particularly valuable at times when Danish kings claimed general supremacy over Norway, or more specifically demanded overlordship of certain regions, notably the Viken or Oslofjord area.

Harald Finehair’s conquest of ‘Norðweg’

Although posterity exaggerated the importance of Harald Finehair there are still good reasons for taking his reign as the point of departure for the political unification of Norway. It is true that we cannot exclude the possibility that earlier kings had also succeeded in bringing more than one region under their rule, but if so their realms disintegrated without leaving evidence of their existence. Moreover, the tendencies towards unification in the ninth and tenth

3 F. Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, B:1. (København, 1912), p. 576; B. Einarsson (ed.), *Fagrskinna (Íslenzk fornrit*, 29, Reykjavík, 1985), pp. 58–65; B. Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Heimskringla*, 1 (*Íslenzk fornrit*, 26, Reykjavík, 1979), pp. 117–18.

4 C. Krag, ‘Norge som odel i Harald Hårfagres ætt’, *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 68 (Oslo, 1989), pp. 288–301.

5 *Fagrskinna*, 58–9; Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Heimskringla*, 2 (*Íslenzk fornrit*, 27, Reykjavík, 1979), pp. 43–6; Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge*, pp. 84–8, 97–9.

centuries were connected with specific social and cultural conditions of the Viking Age, which continued to play a role in the eleventh century.

It is also possible that a need among the broader population for political cooperation throughout large areas contributed to the unification process. It has been suggested that the establishment of the *Gulapingsløg*, the law province of Vestlandet consisting of the districts of Fjordane, Sogn, Hordaland and Rogaland, was due to such a broader initiative, as was the foundation of the Icelandic *Althing* around 930 (see Chapter 8(d)). But the formation of the *lawthing* (ON *lögþing*) of *Gulathing* may still have owed more to royal initiative since royal power was particularly strong in Vestlandet in the mid-tenth century. Such a *lawthing* was different from earlier local public assemblies of all freemen in that it was a representative body for a larger area, consisting of specially appointed men who only met once a year; for a long time it was also the highest judicial assembly in the country and the only one that could ratify laws.

In the early Viking Age, or perhaps even earlier, there was also a *lawthing* in Trøndelag that met at Frosta, but at that time the province of *Frostupingsløg* included only Trøndelag proper, not the adjacent regions of Nordmøre and Romsdal to the south and the rest of Norway to the north as it did later. Thus, the establishment of the *Frostathing* cannot be seen as part of a unification process.⁶

The first phase of the consolidation of Norwegian territory, then, is associated with the name of Harald Finehair. In accordance with the saga tradition, in particular the account of the Icelander Snorri Sturluson of around 1230, the battle of Hafrsfjord in south-western Norway in the late ninth century has been recognised as Harald's last and decisive victory over local petty kings and chieftains who opposed his conquests. On the basis of ambivalent saga evidence the battle has been dated to 872 or close to that year. The more radical saga criticism and historical discussion of the 1920s called in question the dating and the importance of the Hafrsfjord battle as well as the whole process of Harald's conquests, described in great detail by Snorri.⁷ For various reasons a somewhat later but still uncertain date has been suggested for the battle, but there is no evidence to link the battle with any particular stage of Harald's conquests. It is, however, described in considerable detail in a contemporary skaldic poem, *Haraldskvæði*,⁸ and there can be no doubt that it actually took

6 Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge*, pp. 97–101; Krag, *Vikingtid og rikssamling* (K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norges historie*, 2, Oslo, 1995), pp. 97–8.

7 Dahl, *Norsk historieforskning*, pp. 235–43, 250–4.

8 Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, B:1, pp. 22–5.

place. It may be considered to be the first major event in Norwegian history for which there is fairly reliable written evidence.

There is some information on Harald Finehair's background although the extant sources leave much unclear. His father was Halfdan *svarti* (the Black), probably a petty king in Ringerike–Hadeland in Opplandene ('the uplands'), the interior part of Østlandet. His mother's name is said to have been Ragnhild. According to the earliest extant saga tradition she was the daughter of a certain Harald *gullskæggr* ('Goldbeard'), petty king of Sogn in Vestlandet, whereas later and more comprehensive sagas paint her as east Norwegian and a descendant of the legendary royal family of the Danish *Skjöldungar*. This was most likely a view that was developed later; it provided Harald with a more distinguished maternal ancestry, and linked him more closely with Østlandet.⁹

The older texts make Sogn the point of departure for Harald's conquests. But this does not solve the problem of the geographical origin of the unification, since all the saga information dates from a much later period. It is more important that the relatively few occasions when Harald is mentioned in contemporary skaldic poetry tie him and his rule to Vestlandet, notably the southern parts of this region. According to the saga tradition he had several estates at his disposal in this area, and he is also said to have been buried at Haugesund.

When interpreted independently of the later saga texts *Haraldskvæði* seems to indicate that Harald did not, as related by Snorri, come to the battle of Hafrsfjord from the north, attacking the remaining petty kings. Rather he was himself attacked in a south-western kingdom that was already in his possession.¹⁰ The attackers may have come from Agder and Viken, probably as Danish allies. There may have been a connection between the temporary weakening of the Danish kingdom in the decades around 900 and the establishment of a new kingdom in Norway. At least there was a later connection between the loss of power by Harald's descendants in the second half of the tenth century and the restoration of the Danish monarchy under Gorm and Harald Bluetooth (Chapter 8(b)).

The relative strength of Harald's rule is indicated by his contact with the English king Athelstan who fostered his son Håkon, but there is no clear and reliable information of the internal structure of Harald's kingdom. Nevertheless, the tradition that he cooperated with various *jarlar* (earls) may have

9 Ó. Einarsdóttir, 'Harald Dovrefostre af Sogn', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 50 (Oslo, 1971), pp. 163–6; Krag, 'Vestfold som utgangspunkt for den norske rikssamlingen', *Collegium Medievale*, 3 (1990), pp. 183–4, 190–3.

10 K. von See, 'Studien zum Haraldskvæð i', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 76 (1961), pp. 105–11.

some substance. One family appears to have played a special role, the so called *háleygjarlar* (earls of Hålogaland, i.e. Norway north of Trøndelag), who in the late ninth century settled at Lade, across the mouth of the river Nid from the later town of Nidaros (Trondheim). In the formation of a new political order in Trøndelag and north Norway Earl Håkon Grjotgardsson was perhaps more important than Harald.¹¹ Another earl whose name is known is Ragnvald, earl of Møre in northern Vestlandet. Harald's relationship with such earls would probably entail their formal recognition of the king as their overlord but in such a fashion that they would keep a relatively strong and independent position in their own territories. The core of Harald's kingdom appears to have been central and southern Vestlandet.

There is a later saga tradition that Harald appropriated the *óðal*, i.e. the right of landed property, from the free-holding peasants of Norway and turned them into his tenants. This has been interpreted as reflecting the inner structure of Harald's kingdom. He may have kept large bands of warriors whom the peasants had to entertain. The sustenance of those men was probably in the form of *veizlur*, i.e. contributions in kind, either for the king and his men when touring the country, or for his warriors distributed throughout the countryside for more permanent residence. These onerous and repressive measures may have made the freeholders feel that they were no longer the masters of their own land. Håkon, the son of Harald, is supposed to have reversed the development and given the peasants their *óðal* back.¹²

The important role attributed to Håkon Grjotgardsson is largely due to the story told at King Alfred's court in England in about 890 by the Norwegian Ottar (OE *Ohthere*, cf. Chapter 6). Ottar said that he lived 'northernmost of all *norþmen*' (Northmen or Norwegians), a term that is also known from *Haraldskvæði*, and that he and the other magnates of Hålogaland had large incomes from their taxation of the 'Finns' or Sami as well as from their own arctic hunting and catching. Walrus ivory and other costly products were brought along the Norwegian coast by ship, first to the trading port of Skiringssal (*Sciringesheal*) in Vestfold and from there to Hedeby at the base of Jylland. In the account of this journey Ottar professes to have sailed along the coastal country of *Norðweg* ('north way' or Norway) which he also called 'the land of the *norþmen*'. Ottar's account is proof of the fact that coastal Norway – most probably the western and northern part of present-day Norway, extending northwards from Lindesnes – was at that time

11 A. Holmsen, *Norges historie fra de eldste tider til 1660* (Oslo, 1977, 4th edn), pp. 131–4; Holmsen, *Nye studier i gammel historie* (Oslo, 1976), pp. 61–70.

12 Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge*, pp. 87–90; Holmsen, *Nye studier*, pp. 84–96.

recognised as a geographical and to a certain extent also as an ethnic unit. The communication along the coast and the probable intermingling of powerful families in the same area may have created conditions favourable to political unification.

The Finehair-successors and Danish supremacy

According to later Icelandic chronology Harald Finehair died around 932,¹³ leaving several sons by different women. Two of them had a more prominent position than the others: Eirik, who killed several of his brothers and thus earned the name 'Bloodaxe', and his younger brother Håkon.¹⁴ Eirik was probably the son of Harald's Danish queen and became co-ruler during Harald's last years. Håkon's importance is demonstrated by the fact that he was sent to England to be brought up there so as to forge a link between Harald and King Athelstan. Shortly after Harald's death Eirik was forced to abandon his kingdom and flee Norway. He was active later as a Viking king in York, and fell in battle in 952 or 954 (cf. Chapter 5). When Eirik left Norway the rule passed to Håkon who cooperated closely with Earl Sigurd, the son of Håkon Grjotgardsson.

During his long reign (c. 934–61) Håkon appears to have been on better terms with the Norwegians than his father and brother. Skaldic poems name him 'the Good', and emphasise his positive relations with the farming population. On the basis of saga evidence Håkon is in modern historiography given credit for organising the *leidang* (ON *leiðangr*), corresponding to the Danish *leding*, a naval defence system by which the population put ships and manpower at the king's disposal;¹⁵ it could be mobilised when the country was threatened by attack. The naval levy was probably the reason why Håkon was able to reduce the size of the king's retinue, which had burdened the population economically as well as politically in the reigns of his father and brother.

It may have favoured the establishment of the *leidang* that Håkon and his subjects felt a common need for defence against the sons of Eirik, who, supported by the Danish king Harald Gormsson, perhaps their mother's brother, claimed kingship in Norway; they represented a more repressive kind of rule which it was in the interest of the population to resist. That Håkon had to a large extent to rely on poorly trained peasant soldiers seems to be implied by

13 Ó. Einarssdóttir, 'Dateringen af Harald hårfagers død', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 47 (Oslo, 1968), pp. 30–4.

14 H. Koht, *Harald Hårfagre og rikssamlinga* (Oslo, 1955), pp. 71–8.

15 Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge*, pp. 262–72; Krag, *Vikingtid og rikssamling*, pp. 97–100.

certain details of wording in the skaldic poems dealing with his battles.¹⁶ In 961 he was defeated at Fitjar on the island of Stord in Hordaland by the sons of Eirik, led by Harald *gráfellr* ('Gray-fur') and supported from Denmark. Håkon died from his wounds when withdrawing from the battle.

The rule of Harald Grey-fur and his brothers only lasted for a period of between five and ten years. They killed Earl Sigurd, who had supported Håkon, but in the long run this brought about their own downfall. Sigurd's son Håkon succeeded in making a deal with King Harald Gormsson who turned against Eirik's sons, most likely because they had been acting too independently. A skaldic poem confirms that Håkon killed Harald Gray-fur in a battle in Limfjord in northern Jylland. After that Håkon (c. 965/70–95) was in control of Vestlandet, Trøndelag and Hålogaland, initially as the earl of Harald Gormsson. In Viken it appears that subordinate petty kings ruled under Harald's overlordship.

Danish supremacy had long traditions in this part of Scandinavia. We have already seen (Chapters 5 and 8(b)) that in 813 Danish kings had gone to Vestfold, a province that according to the *Royal Frankish Annals* was situated on the north-western border of the Danish kingdom. The 'chieftains and people' of Vestfold had rebelled and were now forced back into obedience.¹⁷ Later in the ninth century the Danish overlordship of Viken was apparently no longer effective. But until the thirteenth century Danish kings from time to time made claims to be kings of Norway or at least of Viken. The early kingdom of Harald Finehair seems to have consisted primarily of Vestlandet; this was the case not only during Harald's own reign but also under Håkon and the sons of Eirik. In Trøndelag and further north the earls at Lade were mostly in control.

On account of his upbringing in England King Håkon was a Christian. We have already seen that he tried to encourage Christianity in Norway but abandoned the project when it met with strong opposition (Chapter 8(c)). In the coastal districts of Vestlandet the custom of furnishing graves with grave goods gradually petered out, which suggests that Christianity was tolerated even earlier. But in Trøndelag and some other inland regions the situation was different. Earl Håkon, who succeeded Harald Gray-fur, was according to the skalds a vigorous defender of the traditional religion. It was his resistance to Christian missionary activity that allegedly provoked the breach between him and Harald Gormsson. The ensuing conflict ended with the defeat of a Danish military expedition, led by the famous Jomsvikings, in the battle

¹⁶ Holmsen, *Nye studier*, pp. 97–100.

¹⁷ R. Rau (ed.), *Annales regni Francorum*. (*Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte*, 1, Darmstadt, 1968), p. 102.

of *Hjörungavágr* (possibly a fictive name) in Møre in the northern part of Vestlandet. Earl Håkon's devotion to the ancient gods would seem to indicate that his father, Sigurd, the close friend and supporter of King Håkon, was just as firmly attached to the old religion. This may have been the reason why King Håkon did not resort to force in his efforts to impose Christianity on his people, and in the skaldic poem of *Hákonarmál* it is implied that he died as a follower of the traditional religion, though not a very eager one. Conversely, his enemies, Harald Gray-fur and his brothers, are portrayed as Christians and violent destroyers of pagan worship.

The Finehair (*hårfagri*) dynasty ruled western Norway for three generations with Harald Grey-fur as its last king. The arguments put forward by modern historians in support of the saga tradition that later kings too belonged to the Finehair family are not conclusive.¹⁸ For instance, when several skalds provide Olaf Haraldsson with the epithet 'heir of Harald' or equivalent appellations they hardly refer to Harald Finehair. What we know of skaldic convention, with its fixed patterns of phrasing, rather indicates that the Harald mentioned is Olaf's own father, the petty king Harald *gvenski* (from Grenland, south of Vestfold). In the saga tradition Harald Hard-ruler is also said to be descended from Harald Finehair as the eventual result of a love affair he had with a Finn (Sami) girl named Snæfrid. But the story of Harald Finehair and Snæfrid is just a fairy tale which leaves Sigurd, their son and the alleged great-grandfather of Harald Hard-ruler, in even greater obscurity than Harald Finehair's several other sons.

Olaf Tryggvason and Olaf Haraldsson

The events outlined above hardly leave room for the idea of a continual and systematic process of unification as early as the tenth century. This was realised by P. A. Munch when he preferred to write of Harald Finehair's 'conquering together' of various parts of the country rather than his 'unification' (*samling*), taking account of the fact that Harald's conquests did not last.¹⁹ Neither did they cover geographically the whole area that was later to become the kingdom of Norway.

Compared with earlier developments the reign of Olaf Tryggvason (995–1000) appears to have been different. His origins were not in Vestlandet but in Viken where his father is said to have been king under Danish overlordship. In

¹⁸ Krag, 'Norge som odel', pp. 296–300.

¹⁹ Munch, *Det norske Folks Historie*, I:I, p. 459.

the first half of the 990s *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* mentions a certain *Anlaf* as an ally of King Sven Forkbeard in England;²⁰ he is probably the later Norwegian king though we cannot be completely certain. In that case Olaf Tryggvason created a platform for himself in affiliation with the Danish kingdom, now the central political force not only in Scandinavia but also in the North Sea region. At the same time Olaf's Norwegian background and ambitions placed him in the periphery of the vast area which King Sven tried to control, and this may have allowed him a certain independence.

Olaf arrived in Norway in 995 just as a rebellion against Earl Håkon was under way, and succeeded in being recognised as king. Very little is known about him or his kingdom. In the later literary tradition Olaf is portrayed both as a Viking hero and a Christian king, in accordance with heroic and hagiographic stereotypes.²¹ In spite of his origin in Viken contemporary skaldic poetry connects him primarily with Vestlandet and Trøndelag. It is possible that he already had a certain foothold in Østlandet and concentrated on building up his power in other parts of the country, but he may also have wished to avoid provoking the Danish king in that sensitive area. Olaf's mother was a certain Astrid from Jæren in south-west Norway and his sister, also named Astrid, married Erling Skjalgsson of Sola in the same district. Erling's wealth and family connections made him the possibly most powerful man of the whole coastal area.

The sagas stress Olaf's role as a missionary king and name three localities where he built churches and negotiated for the conversion of the whole population: Møster in Sunnhordland (southern-central Vestlandet), Selja–Dragseid by the promontory of Stad (northern Vestlandet), and Nidaros (Trondheim) in Trøndelag. There is no contemporary evidence linking Olaf with these localities, but they all appear to be obvious choices for a ruler whose strategy was to consolidate a new kingship and a new faith. Møster and Selja–Dragseid were strategically situated on the shipping route along the coast of Vestlandet, and Nidaros, named after the river mouth where it was situated, across from the earls' residence at Lade, was a natural meeting place between the coastal 'north way' and the rich agricultural districts of Trøndelag. All the three localities mentioned would be natural bridgeheads for a royal power seeking to establish a firmer rule over Vestlandet and Trøndelag, and were to play important roles in the subsequent history of the Norwegian church.

20 D. Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents*, 1 (London, 1979, 2nd edn), p. 234.

21 S. Bagge, 'Helgen, helt og statsbygger: Olav Tryggvason i norsk historieskrivning gjennom 700 år', in S. Supphellen (ed.), *Kongsmenn og krossmenn: Festskrift til Grethe Authén Blom* (Trondheim, 1992), pp. 22–31.

The main factor in bringing about Olaf's downfall after a reign of only a few years was the growing enmity between him and King Sven Forkbeard, who was also influenced by Earl Eirik, son of Earl Håkon Sigurdsson. Håkon had been killed when Olaf seized power and Eirik had formed close ties with King Sven, marrying his daughter Gyda. The final clash was most likely provoked by Olaf's aggressive policy when he interfered in the struggle for Baltic supremacy between the Polish ruler Boleslav and Sven. According to the sagas Olaf assembled a large fleet in Norway with which he sailed south to Danish waters and from there into the Baltic. The king himself was on board the *Ormrinn langi* ('the Long Serpent'), said to be the largest ship ever seen in the north.

All that we really know about the final battle is that it was fought in the year 1000 (or 999), at 'Svoldr' or in Öresund (cf. Chapter 8(b)), and that Olaf fell after having fought against 'two kings and an earl'.²² Sven Forkbeard now succeeded Olaf as king of Norway. The rule over Vestlandet and Trøndelag was transferred to Eirik Håkonsson in his capacity of Sven's earl, possibly together with his brother Svein. In Viken petty kings seem to have continued their rule under Danish overlordship.

In 1015 Olaf Haraldsson (1015–28) returned to Norway from England. There he had most of the time fought in Danish armies against the English, a fact that the later saga tradition tries to play down or even suppress.²³ But he had also served under King Æthelred and is supposed to have followed him in 1013 into his exile in Normandy. During their stay there (1013–14) Olaf converted to Christianity and was baptised in Rouen.

The political circumstances behind Olaf's arrival in Norway are not fully known. The saga tradition mostly has it that he came as an opponent of Knut who was then fighting for his English kingdom. But there is also some skaldic and saga information suggesting that Olaf had reached an understanding with Knut that allowed him to seek power in Norway. At the start of his reign Olaf met with no real opposition from Earl Eirik Håkonsson or his son Earl Håkon, both of them closely connected with Knut. Eirik was already in England assisting Knut, his brother-in-law, and for one reason or another the encounter between Olaf and Håkon on Olaf's arrival in Norway ended peacefully. But Earl Svein, Eirik's half-brother, raised forces to fight Olaf. They met in a naval battle at Nesjar (Brunlanes) at the southern edge of Vestfold on Palm Sunday 1016. Svein was defeated and fled.²⁴

22 Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, B:I, 150–1.

23 Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge*, p. 116; O. Moberg, *Olav Haraldsson, Knut den store och Sverige* (Lund, 1941), pp. 53–70.

24 Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, B:I, pp. 217–20.

After the battle of Nesjar the new kingdom seemed secure, particularly in Østlandet, and for the time being Olaf was also supported by the magnates of coastal western and northern Norway. He was probably the first king to rule over most of the territory of later Norway. He continued the missionary efforts of Olaf Trygvason with the help of bishops and priests he had brought with him from England. Christianity was now established among a larger part of the population to the exclusion of other beliefs, and the first elements of church organisation and church law were introduced.

In the 1020s there was increasing tension between Olaf and Knut of which we are not informed in detail, but the skalds confirm that Knut, who was now in control of both England and Denmark, claimed supremacy over Norway in some form or other, a demand that was rejected by Olaf. Olaf now joined forces with the Swedish king Anund Jakob against the overwhelming Danish royal power, after having married Anund Jakob's sister. The two kings attacked Denmark jointly in 1025/26. Knut came from England with a large fleet and counterattacked. In the battle of Helgeå in Skåne (or Uppland, see Chapter 8(e)) Olaf and Anund Jakob had, according to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, control of the battlefield whereas skaldic poems suggest the opposite outcome proclaiming Knut victorious.

At any rate, Knut now entered a policy of actively seeking alliances with members of the Norwegian coastal aristocracy against Olaf. The policy was successful and led to increasing antagonism between Olaf and many powerful Norwegian magnates. A crisis was reached when Erling Skjalgsson was killed in a minor sea battle in December 1027. Olaf now lost support to the degree that his reign collapsed completely when Knut arrived in Norway with a fleet in the spring of 1028. He left the country to seek refuge with his brother-in-law Prince Yaroslav of Kiev–Novgorod. Knut was recognised king of Norway and did what Danish kings had done before in similar situations: he reinstalled Håkon Eiriksson, who was also his nephew, as his earl of Norway.

In 1029 Håkon Eiriksson was lost at sea when returning to Norway from England. Apparently the political vacuum in Norway, with neither king nor earl present, looked promising to Olaf, who late in the winter of 1029/30 started his journey back from Russia to reconquer his kingdom. He was given a Swedish force of considerable strength by King Anund Jakob, and was also joined by his half-brother Harald Sigurdsson (the later King Harald Hard-ruler) and his men. But when Olaf entered Trøndelag in July 1030 he was opposed by a far greater force. The Norwegian magnates allied with Knut had brought with them fighting men from the coastal areas and were joined by a massive levy of men from Trøndelag itself.

The universal resistance to Olaf in Trøndelag may have been caused by his earlier policy of establishing a more 'modern' and European type of kingdom. Most likely, land confiscations which were aimed at the king's opponents were a major cause of this resistance. A particular chapter of the law of *Frostathing* (IV, 50), the provincial law of Trøndelag, presumably deals with land confiscations by the king as a special case of *atfjör* or *heimsókn* (assault on a person in his home), and lays down the right of resistance to such infringements of the law.²⁵ In addition, Olaf's royal policy may in general have brought him into conflict with popular feeling and a traditional sense of justice, and this may have contributed to bring about his final downfall. In the battle of Stiklestad in the interior of Trøndelag, on 29 July 1030, King Olaf met his death.

For Knut and his Norwegian kingdom the battle of Stiklestad was a complete victory, but it was only a few years before Danish power in Norway suffered a total breakdown. In 1035 Olaf's son Magnus (1035–47), at that time a boy of eleven, was brought back to Norway from his exile in Russia and made king. Several factors are likely to have contributed to this dramatic change. Knut had in 1030 broken with the traditional Danish policy of ruling Norway through native earls and in accordance with the interests of the Norwegian aristocracy. After the battle of Stiklestad he had sent his own son Sven to be king in Norway under the tutelage of his English mother Ælfgifu (ON *Álfifa*). According to a contemporary skaldic poem several Danish men arrived with them and contributed to the building up of a new regime.²⁶ Under the new rule the much hated 'Álfifa laws', as they were later called, moulded on English patterns, were enforced; they expanded the power of the king and the financial basis of the kingdom. The ground was now cleared for a new alliance: between on the one hand the former enemies of Olaf who felt themselves pushed aside by the Danish regime, and on the other the newly established Church which, after an interlude with a Danish bishop as its leader, was again headed by Bishop Grimkell, an Englishman who had been King Olaf's close associate in his missionary efforts and the establishment of the first elements of a Norwegian church organisation.

The two most powerful men in Trøndelag, Einar *þambarskelfir* (one who causes the bowstring to tremble) and Kalv Arnesson, both of them leading men in the former coalition against Olaf, went to Russia in 1034 in order to bring back Olaf's young son and have him accepted as king. Sven and Álfifa now left the country without fighting. According to the later sagas the change in power

25 R. Keyser and P. A. Munch (eds.), *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387*, I (Christiania, 1846), pp. 172–3; Holmsen, *Nye studier*, pp. 101–19.

26 Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, B:1, p. 300.

was prepared by miracles at the grave of King Olaf, leading already in 1031–2 to an increasing belief in the fallen king's holiness. However, these accounts are vague, inaccurate and self-contradictory. Taken together the evidence seems to indicate that the idea of Olaf's holiness was developed and corroborated by miracle stories in the last part of the reign of Sven and Álfifa, and that it was connected with the accession of King Magnus Olafsson.²⁷

The eleventh-century unification

After the official Christianisation of most of the country in the reigns of Olaf Tryggvason and Olaf Haraldsson and the establishment of an elementary church organisation, Norway was on the threshold of finding its way into the family of more established European kingdoms. The presence and expansion of the Church and its services, from which kingship could benefit, laid the foundations for a firmer and more stable political power. Only at this stage could political unification of the country seriously begin. But even if such eleventh-century conditions were generally decisive for the structure and character of political organisation they did not determine the geographic extent of the Norwegian kingdom and its strength in relation to the neighbouring kingdoms. Other forces were at work in moulding the political units that were taking shape in Scandinavia, and as late as the 1030s the situation was still very open with opportunities for other political units to develop.

In this situation the changes that occurred in 1035 were of paramount importance.²⁸ This was the year when Sven and Álfifa had to flee the country and Knut died in England. The Danish North Sea empire now dissolved rapidly and royal power in Denmark was substantially weakened, enabling the new Norwegian regime to consolidate its power. Had the Danish kingdom been as strong in the 1030s as it was in the previous decade it would probably have benefited from cooperation with the Church in Norway, thereby consolidating its position. But in the event Magnus and the succeeding kings of Norway were the ones to gain from the situation.

The new Norwegian regime was closely associated with King Olaf and his saintly status. Magnus had ascended to the throne as his son, and the next king, Harald Sigurdsson Hard-ruler (1046–66), won his royal position as St Olaf's half-brother. After the defeat at Stiklestad in 1030 he fled east, first to

27 S. Hellberg, 'Kring tillkomsten av Glælognskviða', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 99 (1984), pp. 18–22; Krag, *Vikingtid og rikssamling*, pp. 158–65.

28 K. Helle, 'Norway 800–1200', in A. Faulkes and R. Perkins (eds.), *Viking Revaluations* (London, 1993), p. 10.

Russia and then to Byzantium, where he served in the emperor's Varangian guard, rising to the rank of commanding officer.²⁹ In this capacity he obviously enriched himself; his gold and silver was an important asset when he entered Scandinavian politics. Arriving in Sweden and Denmark in 1045 Harald seems at first to have contemplated an alliance with the Danish pretender Sven Estridsen against Magnus Olafsson who was at that time king of both Norway and Denmark (cf. Chapter 8(b)), but he changed his mind and worked out an agreement with Magnus in 1046. They agreed to share the Norwegian royal power, both of them with the title of king.

At the death of Magnus in 1047 Harald became sole ruler of Norway. He was succeeded by his son Olaf Kyrre (ON *kýrri*, 'the Quiet', 1066–93) who was in turn succeeded by his son Magnus Bare-leg (ON *berfættr*, 1093–1103). Magnus left three sons: Olaf (1103–15), Eystein (1103–23) and Sigurd Crusader (ON *Jórsalafari*, 'Jerusalem-farer', 1103–30); they shared the kingdom until Sigurd, as the only surviving brother, became sole ruler (1123–30).

Royal and ecclesiastical cooperation helped to consolidate the kingdom at both a national and an international level. The Norwegian kings came to belong to the group of north European princes who were in various ways seeking contact with each other – by diplomacy, negotiations and political agreements as well as by intermarriage. The relations of the Norwegian kings with the international Church were generally satisfactory, with the exception of a protracted conflict between Harald Hard-ruler and the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen. The latter complained, apparently with good reason, of Harald's disrespect of his supreme ecclesiastical authority over the churches of the north and of Harald's ruthless treatment of the Church in order to increase his royal income. One of the main issues was that Harald refused to respect the archbishop's metropolitan right of consecrating Norwegian bishops, and had them consecrated elsewhere. On one occasion Harald is said to have answered the protesting envoys from Bremen that he 'knew of no other archbishop or master in Norway than the king himself'.³⁰ However, the conflict never disturbed the internal development of the Norwegian church. Throughout the eleventh and the early twelfth centuries there was a steady growth in ecclesiastical activity, supported by the kings as well as by magnates and rich freeholders.³¹ The building of a great number of centrally located churches

29 S. Blöndal, 'The last exploits of Harald Sigurdsson in Greek service', *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 2 (København, 1939), pp. 1–26.

30 Adam of Bremen, in W. Trillmich (ed.), *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches* (Darmstadt, 1968), p. 348.

31 Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge*, pp. 301–37.

throughout the country was of special importance, laying the foundation for the later division into parishes.

The king was in fact head of the eleventh- and early twelfth-century Norwegian church. The bishops of the missionary period had been members of the royal *hirð* or body of retainers, and continued to be appointed by the king when, from the reign of Olaf Kyrre, they began to take up permanent residences in the most important of Norway's young towns – Trondheim, Bergen and Oslo – in which the kings too resided to an increasing degree. Eventually the Church was able to strengthen its finances with the help of donations of land to churches and ecclesiastical institutions by kings, magnates and wealthy freeholders, supplemented by contributions from the broad mass of the population in the form of building and upkeep of local churches, fixed annual dues for the sustenance of bishops and priests, and fees charged for ecclesiastical services. Particularly important was the first introduction of tithe which probably took place towards the end of the period treated here, during the reign of Sigurd Crusader.

Some of the Norwegian historians under the influence of the Marxist approach to history have suggested that the eleventh-century kingdom was totally different from that of the previous Viking Age, mainly because the economic basis for political and social power had changed. In their view political power in the Viking Age was built on riches from abroad and commercial wealth, whereas in the following period it had to be based on what the land of the country itself could produce.³² Consequently, the kings had to rely increasingly on the contributions of the peasants and relate to a land-owning élite that gradually replaced the old trading and warring coastal aristocracy. Royal power had to be based on the interests of peasant society and its leaders as a peaceful 'people's kingdom'. This perspective has been fruitful inasmuch as it has drawn attention to the importance of the inclusion of the rich inland agricultural districts in the eleventh-century kingdom, notably those of Opplandene, which were brought under royal control by Olaf Haraldsson and finally by Harald Hard-ruler. Nevertheless, it seems too simple and disregards some fundamentally important facts.

Kingship was, as before, mainly built on armed force. This was most obvious during the reign of Harald Sigurdsson, who gained his nickname 'Hard-ruler' because of his violent regime. In reaction to a rebellion in Opplandene he burnt down large areas while his skalds mocked the victims in scornful verses.³³ Thus

³² Holmsen, *Norges historie*, pp. 158–61; Dahl, *Norsk historieforskning*, p. 275.

³³ Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, B:1, pp. 343–4.

he turned out to be the same ruthless 'Bulgar burner' (a skaldic epithet) at home as he had been in the Balkans. He also confiscated large quantities of land, which later partly ended up in the possession of the bishop of Oslo. In Trøndelag he demonstrated his brutality by arranging for the murder of two of his chief opponents, Einar *pambarskelfir* and his son Eindride, when they arrived for negotiations.

The Viking Age concept of Denmark, Norway and Britain as constituting to some extent one and the same political and military scene was still influential in the mid-eleventh century. Magnus Olafsson was elected Danish king in 1042 and Harald Hard-ruler tried to uphold this position by annual campaigns in Danish waters until he finally made a truce with King Sven Estridsen in 1064. Harald's expedition to England in 1066, where he fell in the battle at Stamford Bridge, was intended to carry into effect his claim to be Knut's lawful successor to the English throne. The campaigns of Magnus Bare-leg in Ireland (1098–9 and 1102–3) are also best understood as Viking enterprises, and the same goes, to some extent, for King Sigurd's crusade of 1108–11 and his campaign in southern Sweden in 1124.

The comparative strength of the Norwegian kingdom in relation to the Danish after 1042 had a stabilising internal effect. For a considerable period it was not possible, as it had been before, for the Norwegian aristocracy to seek support in Denmark against the Norwegian king. The aristocracy became more closely attached to the king as his liegemen, organised in his *hirð* or retinue. From an early stage the *hirð* had been the king's suite of warriors, his personal bodyguard and the core of his military force, consisting of young men of prominent families and others who were good fighters. To some extent the Christianising efforts of the missionary kings and the building up of church organisation changed the character of the *hirð*. Bishops were included as influential advisers in the inner circle surrounding the king, and on a lower level a clerical element made itself useful in the *hirð*, taking care of religious services and dealing with administrative tasks requiring literacy.

In the reign of Olaf Kyrre the *hirð* was reorganised in a way that reveals a more court-like, civilian character:³⁴ a new group of *hirð*-members is mentioned, the so-called *skutilsveinar*, a name which derives in part from Old English *scutel*, 'dish'. The *skutilsveinar* were responsible for serving at the king's table and were soon to be separated as a formal group that outranked the ordinary *hirð*-men. Among the *skutilsveinar* were appointed a cupbearer (*skenkjari*) and a seneschal (*dróttseti*); they constituted a new group of *hirð*

34 F. Hødnebo (ed.), *KLNM*, 6 (Oslo, 1961), cols. 568–77.

officials together with the old leaders, the marshal (*stallari*) and the standard bearer (*merkismaðr*).

The top layer of the *hirð* came to consist of the so-called *lendir menn* ('landed men'),³⁵ local magnates who were attached to the king and owed him fealty and service. A *lendir maðr* received crown land from the king as a personal fief but at the same time enjoyed a substantial income from his own land; it was his prominent social position that made him a particularly valuable ally of the king. In contemporary skaldic poetry *lendir menn* are first mentioned in the reign of Olaf Haraldsson. Their importance increased throughout the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, but their number is a matter of debate; the estimates vary from about forty to about one hundred c. 1100. The *lendir menn* had a wide range of political, military, legal and administrative responsibilities. One of the most important was their leading role in the *leidang* system which was now better organised, and they also represented the king in judicial matters.

In these tasks the *lendir menn* were supplemented by the king's *ármenn* (stewards).³⁶ The Norwegian provincial laws, which were probably first written down in the late eleventh century but are only known to us in later compilations, confirm the increasing interest and role of the king in judicial affairs. The *lendir maðr* or *ármaðr* of a district had the right of *yfirsókn* ('higher right of prosecution') on behalf of the king and in this capacity brought cases to the appropriate *thing*, either the local assembly or the higher provincial *lawthing* which functioned as a court of appeal. It was also his duty to see that fines and compensations were paid by people convicted, to the king as well as to private injured parties.

The internal stabilisation and the legal and administrative expansion of the kingdom went hand in hand with the outward consolidation in relation to the neighbouring kingdoms. The kings, not least Sigurd Crusader, did much to strengthen their control over Viken and Bohuslän where Danish power had traditionally been dominant. The Norwegian border was now pushed south to the River (Göta älv) where the town of Konghelle was established, at the latest, in King Sigurd's days.

At the same time the dynastic relations between the Norwegian and Danish kingdoms remained unclear. The fact that in the long run both a Norwegian and a Danish dynasty managed to retain their positions was primarily due to geographical circumstances. It proved difficult if not impossible for one king

³⁵ KLNLM, 10 (1965), cols. 498–505.

³⁶ KLNLM, 20 (1976), cols. 446–50.

to extend sufficient power and influence across both Norwegian and Danish territory for a long period. The policy of the Swedish kings also played an important role. Generally they supported the Norwegian or Danish kings or pretenders who opposed actual or potential rulers over both Denmark and Norway. This policy of power balance was particularly effective in the period 1020–64, a crucial stage in the process that resulted in three separate Scandinavian kingdoms.

8 (d) The Norse island communities of the Western Ocean

MAGNÚS STEFÁNSSON

The area from Ireland and the Irish Sea in the south-west to Greenland in the north-west saw an extensive expansion of Norse settlement in the ninth and tenth centuries (cf. Chapter 5). Cultural contacts across the sea between Norway and the British Isles may have begun much earlier. On the basis of archaeological evidence it has been suggested that they had been established already in the Migration Period and that there were connections between Norway and Orkney in the seventh and eighth centuries.¹ The earliest known Viking raids on the coasts of Britain and Ireland towards the end of the eighth century suggest that by then there were at least Norse pirate settlements in the Northern and Western Isles and a few Norse grave finds in the islands may possibly be older than 800. However, it appears that the westward expansion of settlement from Norway did not assume larger proportions until the mid-ninth century.

The number of emigrants in the following period was sufficient to establish largely Norse communities as far south as Ireland and the Isle of Man, while from Orkney northwards the Norse settlers achieved complete dominance. Here, and in the Hebrides too, they found natural conditions very like those with which they were familiar from the coastal districts of western Norway, the homeland of most of the settlers. But the opportunities for varying combinations of agriculture, animal husbandry, fowling, fishing, and hunting were in

¹ J. Hines, *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the pre-Viking Period* (BAR British Series, 124, Oxford, 1984); J. Hines, 'The Scandinavian character of Anglian England: an update', in M. O. H. Carver (ed.), *The Age of Sutton Hoo* (Woodbridge, 1992); B. Myhre, 'The beginning of the Viking Age: Some current archaeological problems', in A. Faulkes and R. Perkins (eds.), *Viking Revaluations* (London, 1993), pp. 182–216; J. Hines, 'Tidlig kontakt over Nordsjøen og de bakenforliggende årsaker', in J. F. Krøger and H.-F. Naley (eds.), *Nordsjøen: Handel, religion og politikk* (Karmøyseminaret, 1994 og 1995, Karmøy kommune, 1996), pp. 18–30; B. Weber, 'Handel mellom Norge og Orknøylene før norrøn bosetning?', *ibid.*, pp. 31–40.

general probably better than in the Norwegian Vestlandet, where the reserves of new land to exploit were by then restricted.

Everywhere the emigrants were soon organised in social units, some of them of considerable territorial extent. These communities all had powerful chieftains and public assemblies called *things*, features that were rooted in the political structure and legal traditions of the homeland.

Settlements in the south-west

In Orkney and the northern part of the Scottish mainland there is good arable land, and both areas attracted an early and extensive Norse settlement in which the cultivation of grain prevailed.² In Shetland the land was poorer and the damp climate made grain-growing difficult, so that animal husbandry and fishing were relatively more important there. Orkney and Shetland became a springboard for further expansion.

Further south, Norse farmers settled in the Hebrides (ON *Suðreyjar*, 'the southern islands'). A dense pattern of Norse farms was established but the Norse settlers hardly supplanted the earlier Celtic population to the same degree as they did in the Northern Isles. There was probably Celtic influence on the Norse population from the start, with intermarriage from the ninth century. Scholars disagree on the extent of Norse settlement in the Isle of Man and the relations there between Celts and Norse. Traditionally, social and political conditions in the island have been represented as more typically Norse than anywhere else south of Orkney. There is little doubt that the island attracted a fairly dense Norse settlement in the Viking Age, but the limited evidence available also suggests a degree of Celtic continuity in the Norse period.

Our knowledge of social and political conditions in the Norse communities from Shetland to Ireland is incomplete and uncertain but the settlements may roughly be divided into three cultural zones. In the north there was relatively dense agricultural settlement in the fertile islands of Orkney and the northern part of the Scottish mainland. Orkney was an earldom that also

2 For the following, see F. T. Wainwright, *The Northern Isles* (London, 1962); A. Fenton and H. Pálsson (eds.), *The Northern and Western Isles in the Viking World* (Edinburgh, 1984); B. E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland* (Leicester, 1987); P. Holm, 'Ireland, Norse in', in Ph. Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia* (New York, 1993), pp. 323–5; N. Bjørge, 'Norge, Norden og Europa (til ca. 1240)', in N. Bjørge, Ø. Rian and A. Kaartvedt, *Norsk utenrikspolitikkens historie*, 1 (Oslo, 1995), pp. 19–45; D. G. E. Williams, *Land Assessment and Military Organisation in the Norse Settlements in Scotland, c. 900–1200 AD* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 1996).

came to comprise Caithness and Sutherland on the mainland and Shetland to the north. In the south the Viking communities of Ireland and the Isle of Man were characterised by a warrior and trading culture. The Hebrides formed a third zone between the others, combining features of both. In general, social structure was more aristocratic in the north than in the south, but kingdoms or earldoms and military organisations were established throughout the whole area.

During the Viking Age there was a complex hierarchy of kings in Ireland, none of whom was recognised as king of all Ireland despite the persistent and violent attempts of some to gain supremacy. The leaders of the Scandinavian settlers were also called kings by the Irish. They too fought each other. They also fought the Irish, sometimes in alliance with Irish kings; such alliances were already being made before the middle of the ninth century. In 853 a new Viking army, led by Olaf, arrived in Dublin and, according to a contemporary Irish annal, 'the foreigners in Ireland submitted to him and he received tribute from the Irish'. He is described as the son of the king of *Laithlind*. The original meaning of that name is uncertain. It has been supposed to be part of Norway, possibly Rogaland, but was more probably a part of the Hebrides that had been conquered by Scandinavians.

From 856 to 873 Olaf ruled Dublin jointly with Ivar who is widely believed to have been a leader of the Vikings who seized York in 866. After that the authority of the Dublin kings rapidly and dramatically fluctuated and in 902 the Irish conquered Dublin and expelled the Vikings. Some settled in the Isle of Man, the Wirral, and south Lancashire, others continued to raid Scotland.

From 914 a new generation of Vikings began to establish themselves in Ireland, led by Ivar's grandsons. Their main Irish stronghold was again Dublin where the Norse kings were acclaimed at the *thing*, Thingmote, of the town. They had the political ambitions to create a power axis from Dublin to York and achieved control of York from 919 to 927 and intermittently between 939 and 952.

The Viking kingdom of Dublin was based on control of strategic points but never with a firm hold on a large territory. After heavy defeats in the 940s Dublin and its allied camps were reduced to a subordinate role in the internal Irish power struggle. From 980 Dublin had to accept the overlordship of the Irish king of Tara, to whom the ambitious Norse ruler Sigtrygg Silk-beard (989–1036) had to pay tribute. Sigtrygg tried to gain independence by allying himself, time and again, with the kingdom of Leinster and was the probable architect of the coalition of Leinster and the Orkney earldom that lost the

epic battle of Clontarf near Dublin in 1014. Sigtrygg saved himself and his kingdom from total defeat by staying away from the battle but Dublin was now irrevocably reduced to a minor power.

Nevertheless, by the eleventh century Dublin, like other Scandinavian bases in Ireland, was an expanding urban community with a flourishing trade across the Irish Sea to such ports as Chester and Bristol. It was also an important port of call for traders and others travelling between Scandinavia and western France and the Mediterranean. It was relatively wealthy and thus a potential resource for Irish kings in their competition for power. In the words of an Irish historian: 'The Irish provincial king who could milk Dublin, Waterford or Limerick for tribute was far more powerful than his peers who extorted allegiance from 20 tribal kings.' From 1052 Dublin was held by Irish kings, except for an interlude between 1091 and 1094, when the Norse king of Man and the Hebrides held it subject to an Irish overlord.

The Orkney earldom may have begun in the late ninth century. The main source for its history is *Orkneyinga saga* from around 1200. Here and in other Norse-Icelandic sagas and chronicles the first earls are said to have been members of the powerful Norwegian family of the earls of Møre in northern Vestlandet. At first they controlled Orkney and perhaps Shetland, and soon turned their territorial ambitions towards the Scottish mainland and the Hebrides. Earl Sigurd *digri* ('the Stout'), who fell in the battle of Clontarf in 1014, made conquests on the mainland and tried to extend his dominion via the Hebrides to Ireland. He married a daughter of the Scottish king, Malcolm II, and under their son, Earl Thorfinn the Mighty (d. by 1065), the earldom reached the zenith of its power.

Earl Sigurd had conquered Caithness and Sutherland and Thorfinn ruled the two provinces as a fief from his royal grandfather. Thus originated 'the dual earldom', with earls who held their mainland possessions as vassals of the Scottish king and in the Northern Isles were subordinate to the Norwegian crown. Thorfinn also appears to have exerted control over the western seaboard of Scotland and the Western Isles, and he is supposed to have raided Ireland and England. As the founder of the Orkney bishopric his ambition was probably, like that of the early Christian kings of Scandinavia, to rule by a combination of political and ecclesiastical authority. At that time the Norse population of his territories had been Christian for at least two hundred years. The early bishops of Orkney were consecrated by the archbishops of York or Hamburg-Bremen.

The earldom had a markedly aristocratic and military character. The earl was surrounded by the warrior élite of Orkney, chieftains or magnates called

gæðingar ('good men') in *Orkneyinga saga*. They were his counsellors, commanded his warships, and apparently had judicial and administrative functions in the local districts where they owned land. From the twelfth century some of them were also granted land by the earls in return for military service. Their position was similar to that of the contemporary *lendir menn* of Norway (Chapter 8(c)). Like the Scandinavian kings the earl also had his *hirð* or retinue that functioned as a court in peacetime and in war as the earl's bodyguard and the core of his fighting force.

The earldom's early economy must to a large extent have been based on war, pillage and tribute. But the earls also possessed extensive landed estates and acquired the right to collect dues from the population of the earldom. An old administrative division of Orkney into ouncelands (ON *eyrislönd*, sing. *eyrisland*) must have originated as a means of assessing such dues. There are traces too of the ounceland system in Shetland and along the northern and western coast of Scotland. It may go back to the days of Earl Sigurd the Stout, whereas the subdivision of ouncelands into pennylands must be younger, possibly from the days of Earl Thorfinn the Mighty. There is some evidence to suggest that the two systems, neither of them known in Norway, were in part superimposed on pre-Norse land divisions. Traditionally they have been associated with a *leidang* organisation of Norwegian type but it is doubtful whether such an organisation ever functioned in Orkney. The offensive warfare and plundering raids of the early earldom was probably mostly carried out by the earls, their chieftains and their personal followings, and the earls may also have had the main responsibility for defence, possibly supported by taxation of land and a general levy of fighting men.

Orkney was a legal community of its own, probably influenced by the legal customs of the Gulathing law province of Vestlandet. Late medieval sources show that Orkney, with Caithness, was divided into administrative and judicial quarters (ON *ffjórðungar*, sing. *ffjórðungr*) that each sent nine *roithmen* (ON *ráðmenn*, councillors) to the common *lawthing*. These thirty-six formed the *löggrétta*, the judgingbody. The assembly was headed by a lawman (ON *lögmaðr*). The local courts or *things* of Orkney were probably under the earl's control at an early date, and the main assembly came to be his court, attended by the *gæðingar*. There are few place-names in Orkney and Caithness containing the element *thing* and no other evidence for a hierarchy of assemblies as in Norway and Iceland. The earl's dominant authority in legal and judicial matters may have hindered the development of a strong *thing* system.

According to *Orkneyinga saga* the earls from the start held the Northern Isles under the overlordship of the Norwegian king, but before the days of King

Olaf Haraldsson and Earl Thorfinn the Mighty there is little to support this tradition. Thorfinn apparently found it to his advantage to acknowledge the Norwegian king as his overlord. For a ruler of his ability and power the dual earldom must have opened the possibility of playing off one overlord against another. But the position between Norway and Scotland became increasingly difficult as the kings of the two countries expanded their territorial power; they could exploit the custom of succession by which sons of earls and their descendants could lay claim to one-third or half of the earldom. After the death of Earl Sigurd the Stout in 1014 this frequently led to the partition of the earldom and consequently to rivalry and open fighting among co-rulers and pretenders. Those who sought Norwegian or Scottish support had to pay for it by submission.

The political situation in the Hebrides was characterised by the rivalry of petty kings and chieftains as in Ireland. The Norwegian kings must have entertained hopes of increasing their influence over the Western Isles through the Orkney earls, but such hopes were lost with the death of Earl Thorfinn in about 1065. A joint kingdom of the Isles became more effective in the following years; it was ruled from the Isle of Man and we have seen that it controlled Dublin for a brief period. In the years 1098–9 and 1102–3 King Magnus Bareleg of Norway led two large-scale military expeditions west over the sea. His plan was obviously to unite Orkney, the Hebrides and the Isle of Man under his own son Sigurd as king, in close alliance with Dublin, the strongest Irish power centre. Norwegian supremacy over the Norse island communities from Man to Shetland was now asserted, and in 1098 the Scottish king expressly recognised Man and the Hebrides as Norwegian territory. But Magnus was killed in Ireland in 1103 and the internal power struggle soon flared up again in the Western Isles. The overlordship of the Norwegian king over the Isles was at least formally strengthened by Magnus' expeditions and the joint kingdom was tied more closely to Norway. But Norwegian supremacy was dependent on the need among the rival kings and chieftains for Norwegian support, and was never stable.

Little is known about the legal and administrative system of the Hebrides. At a later date the Council of the Isles met on Eilean na Comhairle ('council island') in Islay in the southern Hebrides. This was also where the Lord of the Isles was later acclaimed and had his seat. There may have been several other meeting places for lesser assemblies in the islands, as indicated by the few place-names containing the element of *thing*.

Of all the areas in the British Isles settled by the Norse the Isle of Man had what appears to have been the most clearly structured medieval land divisions.

The island was divided in two, the topographically natural units of Northside and Southside, each of them subdivided into three *sheadings*, which in turn contained two or three parishes. The parishes were subdivided into *treens*, and these were further divided into quarterlands. This has traditionally been regarded, not least by Norwegian scholars, as a social and political organisation derived from Norway. But given the indications of Celtic continuity in the Norse period and Man's geographic situation in the middle of the Irish Sea, exposed to influences and inroads from England, Scotland and Ireland, this is hardly a plausible view. There is some evidence to suggest that the quarterlands, *treens* and *sheadings* were pre-Norse land divisions that were adopted by the Norse and partly renamed in the Norse period. Thus the six *sheadings* may owe their name to ON *séttungr* (a sixth), and the *treen* may represent a superimposition of the Orkney ounceland assessment onto older land units, possibly for the sake of tribute in the days of Earl Sigurd the Stout. The division into parishes may go back to the reign of Olaf I, king of Man and the Isles (1103–54), who had been brought up in Anglo-Norman England and reformed the Church on Man.

A more originally Norse innovation was the *thing* for Man and the Isles that later met at Tynwald ('*thing*-field') Hill each year on 5 July, the old St John's Day. Laws for Man were not valid until they had been proclaimed there, and this was also where new kings were acclaimed and peace meetings held between contenders to the throne.

In the north, Shetland was ruled by the Orkney earls until 1195 when the archipelago was put directly under the Norwegian crown. Shetland's *thing* met at Tingwall and the law court probably had its seat on Tingholm ('*thing* holm' or 'islet') in Tingwall loch. Place-names such as Delting, Sandsting and Aithsting apparently indicate local *thing*-gatherings but it is possible that such assemblies only developed after Shetland was put directly under the Norwegian crown.

Colonisation in the north-west

Føroyar (ON *Færeyjar*, 'sheep islands') are first described by the Irish cleric Dicuil in about 825.³ He had heard of this group of islands, which he does not name, from an Irish priest who had been there. The islands were separated

3 J. J. Tierney (ed.), 'Dicuili Liber de mensura orbis terrae', *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 6 (Dublin, 1967), pp. 11–33.

from each other by narrow sounds and had an abundance of seabirds and sheep. Irish hermits had lived there for about a hundred years but had now left because of Norse bandits.

Pollen analysis has indicated settlement in the islands as early as about AD 600; at that time oats were cultivated and there were vegetational changes due to the grazing of sheep. So far the early botanical settlement traces have not been corroborated by archaeological finds and it is an open question whether they should be attributed to the hermits mentioned by Dicuil or to a more extensive immigration. There is at present no archaeological evidence for permanent settlement in Føroyar before about 900 when barley began to be cultivated. Evidently the Norse colonisation of the islands was then under way. Later saga evidence suggests that it may have started in the early ninth century, but an earlier date cannot be excluded.⁴

The Viking Age colonisation of Iceland (*Ísland*) was led by chieftains and well-to-do farmers from western Norway and the British Isles. In the later Icelandic narratives it is invariably referred to as *landnám*, 'land-taking' or 'land claim'. Major sources such as *Íslendingabók* ('Book of Icelanders'), written by Ari fróði ('the Wise') in about 1130, and *Landnámabók*, probably from about the same time but only preserved in later versions, report that settlement began in about 870. Since these works were not written until 250 years later they should not be taken at face value. Nevertheless, their accounts of the *landnám* have in the main been accepted in modern historiography.

It has been claimed that Norse settlement started at the end of the sixth century or, at the latest, in the seventh century.⁵ This hypothesis is mainly based on ¹⁴C dates of material found in archaeological excavations on Vestmannaeyjar off the south coast of Iceland, where early settlement could be expected. The dated material was found under the volcanic 'Settlement Layer' (tephra), traditionally assumed to derive from an eruption in about 900 or possibly somewhat earlier. This assumption has now been confirmed by analysis of cores drilled in the Greenland ice which dates the Settlement Layer fairly accurately to AD 871 (± 2).⁶ Doubt has also been raised about the reliability

4 H. J. Debes, 'Færøerne og Norge: En tusindårig forbindelses begyndelse, forløb og afslutning', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 74 (Oslo, 1995), pp. 22–33.

5 See 'The early settlements of Iceland: Discussions', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 24:1 (1991), pp. 1–33. The discussions are based on M. Hermanns-Auðardóttir, 'Íslands tidiga bosättning' (doctoral thesis, Umeå, 1989), a condensation of which is given on pp. 1–9.

6 'Express Letter: Ash layers from Iceland and the Greenland GRIP ice core correlated with oceanic and land sediments', *EPSL, Earth and Planetary Science Letters*, 135 (1995), pp. 149–55.

of the ^{14}C method, due to the possible effect of volcanic carbon dioxide on the apparent age of samples dated by this method.⁷ Consequently, the dating of traces of the earliest settlement to the sixth or seventh centuries, to which considerable international attention has been drawn, can now be rejected. The earliest habitation remnants that have so far been excavated in Iceland, in Reykjavík in 1971–3, were found underneath the Settlement Layer and must therefore be somewhat older than 870. But that does not seriously weaken the validity of the traditional dating of the Icelandic *landnám*.

The Norse colonisation of Iceland was an extension of the Viking settlements in the British Isles and Føroyar. According to *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*, Irish hermits, *papar*, had lived in Iceland for a while before the Norse settlement. This is corroborated by Dicuil who believed Iceland to be the *Thule* that classical geographers had heard of in the extreme north. According to Ari the *papar* left Iceland on the arrival of the Norse settlers; they did not want to live among heathens. Their presence in Iceland may go back to the early eighth century when Bede mentions Thule.

Most of the Norse settlers came directly from western Norway, though some evidently sailed from the Norse settlements in the British Isles, some of them with Celtic slaves. The question of the Celtic element in the Icelandic population has been controversial. Modern Icelandic blood types suggest a much closer affinity with the Celts than with the Norwegians; Icelanders and Irish today have in common a higher frequency of the O blood group than Norwegians. However, recent research indicates that severe smallpox (variola) epidemics in Iceland have reduced the proportion of A and AB groups in the ABO-system and that this may be the reason why the proportion of O-group people in Iceland is larger than that in Norway, which has not been so badly affected by smallpox since the late fifteenth century.⁸ If this is correct, the blood groups of modern Icelanders can no longer be used as evidence for the ancestry of the Viking Age settlers.

In medieval Icelandic historiography settlers are frequently said to have left Norway in order to escape the tyranny of King Harald Finehair. His rule from the end of the ninth century to about 932 may well have contributed to the increasing emigration from Norway to Iceland in that period, but it cannot have had anything to do with the earliest Norse *landnám* in Iceland. There were obviously other reasons for the later colonisation of Iceland than political unrest in Norway. As mentioned above, the relatively restricted reserves of new

7 H. Sigurðsson, 'Comment on the early settlement of Iceland', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 24:1 (1991), pp. 21–2.

8 S. Aðalsteinsson, 'Blóðflokkar og menning Íslendinga', *Saga*, 30 (1992), pp. 221–43.

land to be exploited in Vestlandet may have been a significant factor. It has been suggested that emigration to Iceland from the Western and Northern Isles was a result of population pressure, even overpopulation, at the end of the ninth century. As the possibilities of settling in Føroyar were already then restricted by the relative scarcity of habitable areas it was natural for people in search of land to go on to Iceland. Moreover, the defeats suffered by the Vikings in Ireland in the second half of the ninth century, culminating in their expulsion from Dublin in 902, may explain why some of them chose to emigrate to Iceland.

Greenland was settled from Iceland at the end of the tenth century under the leadership of Eiríkr *rauði* ('the Red'). Although Iceland was by then quite extensively settled, population pressure was hardly the main reason for this migration; rather, it was that people hoped for better conditions further west. The belief that the grass was 'greener on the other side of the sea' was reflected in the name given to the country, *Grænland*. The same motive had undoubtedly been significant in the earlier settlements of Iceland, Føroyar and the British Isles. Two Icelandic communities were established at the south-western seaboard of Greenland: the Eastern Settlement (*Eystribygð*) and the Western Settlement (*Vestribygð*).

Shortly after the initial settlement of Greenland seafarers from Iceland and Greenland landed on the coasts of North America. They came to *Helluland*, probably Baffin Island with its barren rocks and glaciers, *Markland*, probably Labrador, a forest landscape in contrast to Greenland and Iceland, and *Vínland*, recently identified as Newfoundland, where traces of a Norse settlement site have been found.⁹

Vínland is a mysterious name and its meaning is disputed.¹⁰ It is first recorded about 1075 by Adam of Bremen who explained it by claiming that wild vines grew there, bearing excellent wine. According to Adam there was also an abundance of corn which had not been sown. This is apparently a description of a mythical paradise and far from trustworthy. The critical Ari, who used Adam's work, left out the paradisiac elements, but they were included in *Eiríks saga rauða*, probably written in about 1200. They are also found in the description of the abundant riches of *Vínland* in *Grænlendinga saga*, probably from about 1200, together with a more credible report that there was also grassland so abundant that cattle would not need winter fodder.

9 A. S. Ingstad, *The Norse Discovery of America*, 1 (Oslo, 1977); H. Ingstad, *The Norse Discovery of America*, 2 (Oslo, 1985); A. S. and H. Ingstad, *Oppdagelsen av det nye landet* (Oslo, 1996).

10 For the following, I am indebted to E. Lönnroth, 'The Vinland problem', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 21 (1996), pp. 39–47.

The names *Helluland*, *Markland* and *Vínland* are all 'saga-names', not real place-names. The name-giving of the early Norwegians, Icelanders and Greenlanders was functional, *eptir landkostum* in the words of *Grænlendinga saga*, i.e. based on the features of the land deemed characteristic and important by the name-givers. The excavators of the site at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland took it for granted that ON *vin*, 'pasture' or 'grassland', was the original first element of the saga name *Vínland* and concluded that they had found that land.

It is not clear whether the site at L'Anse aux Meadows was a permanent settlement or just a base for further voyages, as no houses for cattle or sheep and no graves have as yet been found. Although there is no indication that *vin* was used in the sense of 'pasture' or 'grassland' in Iceland, whence Greenland was settled, it is a common element in place-names not only in Norway but also in Shetland and Orkney. The word may have been familiar to travelling Icelandic merchants such as Bjarni Herjólfsson, who according to *Grænlendinga saga* was driven by wind and weather to *Vínland*. It seems more satisfactory, then, to explain the paradisiac land of the sagas as an original *Vínland*, with a short *i* and meaning 'pasture-land' or 'grassland', rather than *Vínland*, with a long *i* and meaning 'wine-land'. In Old Icelandic the difference between short *i* and long *i* was primarily one of length and not of quality,¹¹ and in the Old Icelandic manuscripts *vin* and *vín* were both regularly written in the same way, as *vin*. Linguistically it is thus possible that an original *Vínland* could become the mythical *Vínland* of the sagas.¹²

The voyages to North America were the limit of the westward Norse colonisation of the Viking Age, but there was no permanent Norse settlement in the new land. The distance exceeded the limits that contemporary shipbuilding technology, impressive though it was, imposed for regular contact. Moreover, there were conflicts with the native Algonquian Indian and Inuit population of the region, the *skrælingjar* of the sagas. According to Icelandic annals, Bishop Eiríkr of Greenland sailed to find Vinland in 1121, which suggests that there was no longer any contact with that land, but that it was believed that a Norse population might possibly still survive there.

11 Hr. Benediktsson, 'The vowel system of Icelandic: a survey of its history', *Word*, 15 (1959), pp. 282–312; Hr. Benediktsson, 'Íslandsk språk', in F. Hødnebo (ed.), *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* (Oslo, 1962), cols. 486–93.

12 I am indebted to Professors Hreinn Benediktsson of the University of Iceland and Odd Einar Haugen and Oddvar Nes of the University of Bergen for their help in discussing the linguistic aspect of the Vinland question, which I have treated in detail in Stefánsson, 'Vinland or Vínland?', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 23 (1998), pp. 139–52.

The emergence of political units in the north-west

Our knowledge of political, legal and administrative conditions in Føroyar and Greenland is fragmentary. More is known about Iceland thanks to later historical narratives and law texts, though much is also unclear in the earliest period.

The community of Føroyar appears to have been dominated by chieftains and large landowners, and probably formed a separate legal entity with its own political and administrative institutions quite early. Legislative, executive and judicial powers came to be administered by an *althing* or public assembly which met at Tinganes in Tórshavn. It was presided over by a 'lawman' or law-speaker with a group of judges at his side. Norwegian influence was strong in the islands and by the 1180s, at the latest, they were subject to the Norwegian crown.

In the thirteenth century the two Norse settlements of Greenland comprised about 300 farms with a population of between 1,800 and 2,100. They constituted a separate legal unit with its own laws and a *thing* right up to 1261, when the Norse Greenlanders placed themselves under the Norwegian crown. The *thing* met at *Garðar* in the Eastern Settlement, which was also the seat of the bishop of Greenland from 1124, but a possibly older *thing*-site has been excavated at Brattahlíð, the farm of Eiríkr the Red. The Western Settlement must also have had its *thing*-site, but it has not been identified by archaeologists. Probably the bishop of *Garðar* gradually became the real authority in secular as well as religious matters.

The Icelandic settlements were from the beginning run by chieftains who saw themselves as first among equals. Most of them seem to have arrived as leaders of the crews of one or two ships of settlers and to have claimed possession of vast areas, which would give them social status well above that of most people. From the outset there may have been as many as fifty to sixty *goðar* (sing. *goði*), as the chieftains were called. They were lords of men, not of territory.¹³

We know nothing about relations between the independent groups of settlers or what kind of communities they established at first. However, as settlement progressed and covered more and more of the habitable land, some form of social and political organisation was needed. From their homelands

¹³ For this and the following, see J. V. Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth* (Odense, 1999). An English survey of Icelandic medieval conditions is given in B. and P. Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800–1500* (*The Nordic Series*, 17, Minneapolis, 1993). Cf. also M. Stefánsson, 'Iceland', in *Medieval Scandinavia* (n. 2), pp. 311–19, including a bibliography.

the settlers were familiar with laws and the *thing*-institution. According to later tradition *thing*-meetings were held after about 900.

In about 930 a public assembly for the whole of Iceland, the *Althing* (OI *Alþingi*), was established at Thingvellir in the south-west interior, a place that had good communications with other parts of the country. Power was now, apparently by peaceful negotiations, legally distributed among the chieftains, with no central authority, reflecting the need for peace and order when no individual or family had sufficient resources to control the whole country. This development may also have been influenced by the social and political organisation with which the settlers were familiar in their homelands.

In spite of its decentralised character the political and legal structure sustained by the *Althing* made Iceland, to some extent, a political unit already in the tenth century. In modern foreign historiography this unit is commonly referred to as the 'Free State'. Icelandic historians usually call it *þjóðveldi* ('people's dominion') which has given rise to the term 'Old Icelandic Commonwealth'. None of these terms is adequate for a political organisation that was predominantly oligarchic.

In so far as Iceland was united it was a community of laws. There was no central state power or executive authority. The only common secular official was the *lögsgumaðr*, the law-speaker, who was chairman of the *Althing*, but had no authority or administrative function beyond the annual summer session. During this session it was his duty to declare the rules for the meeting, to recite one-third of the law annually in the course of his three years' term of office, and to interpret the law when necessary. The office of law-speaker persisted until 1271 but was particularly important and influential before the laws began to be written down in 1117/18. The legal code that was made then is no longer extant; the laws of the Free State have only been preserved in *Konungsbók* and *Staðarhólsbók*, manuscripts written between 1250 and 1270, which have different contents, arrangements and formulations. The combined laws of the Free State are called *Grágás* ('grey-goose').

From about 930 power appears to have been divided among thirty-six chieftaincies called *goðorð*, each headed by one or more *goðar* who were equals.¹⁴ In about 965 the country was divided into quarters or *ffjórðungar* (sing. *ffjórðungr*). Quarter *things* (*ffjórðungsþing*) and quarter courts (*ffjórðungsdómar*) were established, the latter as part of the *Althing*, and the number of *goðar* was increased

¹⁴ For the following, see J. Benediktsson, 'Landnám og upphaf allsherjarríkis', in S. Línal (ed.), *Saga Islands*, 1, pp. 172–86.

to thirty-nine. There were now twelve *goðar* in Norðlendingafjórðungur (the northern quarter) and nine in each of the other three quarters: Austfirðingafjórðungur (to the east), Sunnlendingafjórðungur (to the south) and Vestfirðingafjórðungur (to the west). The purpose of this division was probably to maintain the balance of power between the different parts of the country and the ruling families. To secure a balance in the *Althing* three additional men were elected from each of the eastern, southern and western quarters to sit with the *goðar* in the *löggrétta*, the law council, so that there would be twelve representatives from each quarter.

The *Althing* was not an *alþingi* (*allsherjarþing*) in the sense of an ‘assembly of all freemen’, as were, however, the regional courts which were called *várþing* (‘springtime assemblies’). To the *várþing* the *goðar* brought all their *thing*-men, and there appointed every ninth of them to follow them to the *Althing*. The *thing*-men who stayed behind paid their *goði* a due called *þingfararkaup* to meet the expenses incurred by him and his followers by going to the *Althing*. The *Althing* can thus be said to have been a representative assembly.

The judicial system consisted of the *várþing*, the quarter courts of the *Althing*, and shortly after 1000 also the Fifth Court (*fimmtardómr*) of the same assembly. Each *várþing* was the joint responsibility of three *goðar*, each of whom nominated twelve assessors to a panel of thirty-six judges. The quarter courts of the *Althing* functioned as courts of appeal from the *várþing*; most likely they too consisted of thirty-six men. The Fifth Court had forty-eight members of whom thirty-six pronounced sentences; it was both a court of final instance in cases that the quarter courts had not been able to settle, and of first instance in special cases. The *goðar* appointed the members of the courts of the *Althing* but they had no formal judicial authority themselves, nor any responsibility for the legal proceedings and the execution of sentences. However, the mutual personal relationship between *goði* and *thing*-man implied that the former should help the latter to obtain his rights. If the *goði* neglected this, the *thing*-man could turn to another *goði*, more able and willing to help, and become his *thing*-man.

The functions of the law council at the *Althing* were to make new laws (*nýmæli*), interpret existing laws, and to make amendments and exemptions from the law. Here the authority of the *goðar* was formal as well as real; the thirty-nine of them and the nine additional men appointed from three of the quarters made up the forty-eight-strong voting body. Each one of the forty-eight could bring with him two men for consultation, so that altogether the law council, including also the law-speaker and the two bishops of Iceland, had 147 members.

The power of a *goði* was based on his influence in the judicial system, and on his family and its resources. Wealth, in the form of gifts and banquets, was used to secure the support of friends and *thing*-men. The prestige of a *goði*, and the respect in which he was held, increased with the size of his following when riding to the *thing*-meetings or on other journeys. It was only during the *thing* sessions that he possessed territorial power and influence, regionally at the *várthing*, nationally at the *Althing*. At the regional autumn assembly (*leið*) it was his task to report any new legislation and pass on other important announcements and news from the *Althing*. Outside the *thing* sessions his influence was based on the authority he had over his *thing*-men. This might imply a certain local power in his home district. There were, however, local settlement units called *hreppar* (sing. *hreppr*), each under the leadership of five *hreppstjórar*, that were collective organs for specific public tasks (cf. Chapter 13).

Chieftains and the Church in Iceland

The fact that the Icelandic chieftains were called *goðar* (cf. *Ol goð*, 'god') has led to the traditional assumption that their office originated from their function as cultic leaders. This theory is now regarded as doubtful. It is difficult to see any connection between the later judicial, administrative and legislative tasks of the *goðar* and their supposed original function as 'sacrificial priests'. They may well have held cultic and sacrificial feasts for their households, friends and *thing*-men, as indicated by the later saga tradition, but it does not seem reasonable to suppose that the chieftains who established the Icelandic constitution based their rule and political functions on pagan concepts and functions; they came from the Norwegian areas most infiltrated by Christianity and from the Viking settlements in the south-west where Christianity had gained a firm foothold.

Christianity was publicly accepted by the Icelanders at the *Althing* in 999/1000 following tough negotiations and pressure from the Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason (cf. Chapter 7). The dominating position of the *goðar* would hardly have survived the introduction of Christianity if their power had rested on a pagan sacral foundation. Leading men among them were the very persons who initiated the formal acceptance of the new creed at the *Althing*. In doing this they must have been aware of the increased power that kings and chieftains in Western Europe had gained from their leading role in the early Christian church organisation; the Church certainly enabled the *goðar* to increase their power and influence.

Initially the introduction of Christianity did not imply a close relationship with Rome. The Church of Iceland evolved as a 'national church' of Germanic

type in which secular magnates had extensive power and influence. The first native bishop, Ísleifr (1056–80), was the son of one of the leading *goðar* responsible for the conversion in 999/1000, and his family, later called *Haukdælir* (named after the farm of Haukadalur), wielded great power in south-western Iceland. Ísleifr was succeeded by his son Gizurr (1082–1118) who made his farm Skálholt into a permanent bishop's seat, initially for the whole of Iceland.¹⁵ For a long time bishops were chosen on the terms of the *Haukdælir* and later also of their neighbours and allies, the *Oddaverjar* (from the farm of Oddi). These two families dominated both secular and ecclesiastical politics in Iceland, as well as economy and trade.

When a separate bishopric for northern Iceland was established with Hólar as its see at the beginning of the twelfth century, the *Haukdælir* wielded great influence there too, later in cooperation with the *Oddaverjar*. The leading chieftains of the north, the *Ásbirningar*, did not elect one of their own family as bishop until 1201.

Locally the Church expanded as chieftains and wealthy farmers built private churches on their farms. The proprietary church system (German *Eigenkirchewesen*) was initially universal in Iceland, at a time when it was about to break down elsewhere in Europe. The person who built a church was obliged to endow it, to maintain the building and to provide a priest. He administered the property of the church, normally a part of the farm on which it was built, as well as other farms. In the early phase, when priests were not expected to be well educated, the church-farmer would serve as a priest himself or have someone in his household do it. But as time went on, better qualified priests were educated, not only in the episcopal sees but also in schools on important farms such as Haukadalur and Oddi.

Payment of tithes was introduced in Iceland in 1096–7, earlier than elsewhere in Scandinavia. Half of it, the quarters of the church and the priest, was administered by the church-farmer, who thus increased his economic resources. The other two quarters went to the bishop and the poor respectively. The share of the poor was administered within the framework of the *hreppr*, by the five *hreppstjórar*.

Over the years it often happened that the church-farmer gave his church the whole farm on which it was built. The joint ecclesiastical institution of church

¹⁵ For the following, see M. Stefánsson, 'Kirkjuvald eflist', in S. Lindal (ed.), *Saga Íslands*, 2 (Reykjavík, 1975), pp. 55–144; M. Stefánsson, *Staðir og staðamál: studier i islandske egenkirkelige og beneficalrettslige forhold i middelalderen* (Berger, 2000). M. Stefánsson, 'Íslandsk egenkirkevesen', in *Rett og historie: Festskrift til Guðmund Sandvik* (Oslo, 1997), pp. 138–56.

and farm then became a private foundation and an independent economic unit, called *staðr* (Latin *locus religiosus* or *sacer*). It was a usual condition when a *staðr* was created that the donor and his successors should have the right to continue to administer its economy and to benefit from it, which could be a very lucrative privilege. If such a condition was not made the bishop could nominate an administrator for the *staðr*, usually one of the local chieftains.

Concentration of power in Iceland

The spokesmen for Christianity dominated eleventh-century Icelandic politics. After the establishment of the *Althing* in about 930 power began to be concentrated in fewer hands. From the mid-eleventh century this process accelerated and continued until the Icelanders placed themselves under the Norwegian crown in 1262–4.

At first this was to all appearances a largely peaceful process; the influence and power of the leading families seem to have increased mostly by inheritance and marriage, and by friendship relations and alliances. From the end of the eleventh century tithe transferred wealth from the lesser farmers to the bigger ones and probably contributed, more than anything else, to widen the gap between the aristocracy of the *goðar* and the rest of the population. Characteristically, two of the leaders responsible for the introduction of tithe were Bishop Gizurr and Sæmundr Sigfússon *fróði* ('the wise') of Oddi who forged the alliance between the *Haukdælir* and the *Oddaverjar*.

The concentration of power that progressed from the mid-eleventh century was above all characterised by the formation of territorial lordships, *riki* (realms). Domination was established over a district that would eventually have more or less fixed boundaries. At first it included at least three *goðorð* – the area of one *várþing*, and later expanded by the acquisition of ever more *goðorð* by one *goði*. There is evidence to indicate that the territorialisation of the *goðorð* began with a *goði* controlling two *goðorð* in his *várthing* district, thereby gaining authority over two core areas. It then became difficult for the *thing*-men of the third *goði* to gain the support they needed. A *goði* who ruled a *riki* can be called a *stórgoði*, big chieftain. Under the rule of such men it is possible, for the first time, to speak of local government in Iceland.

Until the early twelfth century the *Haukdælir* were the most powerful family in the country and they maintained a leading position throughout the rest of the Free State period. From the mid-eleventh century they dominated Árnesthing, a compact and strategically situated area, comprising the see of Skálholt and lying close to Thingvellir where the *Althing* met. Eyrar on the southern coast,

one of the two most important commercial centres of Iceland in the Free State period, was within their sphere of power.

At the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth centuries *ríki* were established by other leading families such as the *Oddaverjar* in Rangárthing to the east of Árnesthing, the *Ásbirningar* in Hegranesthing/Skagafljörður in northern Iceland, the *Svinfellingar* in the south-east, and the *Austfirðingar* in the east. This development continued a century later with the rise of lordships in Eyjafjörður and Thingeyjarthing in north-eastern Iceland and Borgarfjörður in the west.

In the second half of the twelfth century the *Oddaverjar* came to the fore in Iceland. This is reflected by the fact that a member of the family was elected bishop of Hólar and that the see of Skálholt was given to a protégé of the family, Thorlákr Thórhallsson (1178–93), and then to Páll Jónsson (1195–1211), the son of Jón Loptsson of Oddi. Jón was by far the most influential and powerful Icelandic chieftain of his time.

Around 1200 the *Sturlungar* entered the small group of leading Icelandic families. They were the three sons of the *goði* Hvamm-Sturla of Dalir at Breiðafjörður in western Iceland, who had been active and acquisitive in the second half of the twelfth century. In 1215 Sighvatr Sturluson completed the formation of *ríki* in Eyjafjörður and Thingeyjarthing in the north-east. At the beginning of the thirteenth century his brother, Snorri Sturluson, the great saga writer, established a *ríki* in Borgarfjörður on both sides of the boundary between the quarters Sunnlendingafjórðungur and Vestfirðingafjórðungur. By then the rule that a *goði* could only have *thing*-men within his quarter had long been disregarded.

Around 1220 large *ríki* had taken shape over most of Iceland. Only in the divided Vestfirðir were there no more than tendencies towards the formation of more extensive territorial rule. The development of *ríki* entailed new methods of government by the *stórgoðar*. In this respect the royal *hirð* or retinue in Norway was an important model. Trusted men, *trúnaðarmenn*, functioned as counsellors of the *stórgoðar* and probably also represented them in local government, while their daily retinue of *fylgðarmenn* (followers) or *gestir* ('guests') served as a bodyguard and could be used in police and coercive actions if necessary. Military force was increasingly important in the bitter and destructive power struggle that characterised the last phase of the Free State period.

The power base of the *stórgoðar* changed as the *ríki* evolved. The farmers lost the option of choosing their *goði*. Within a *ríki* they were all subjected to the same *stórgoði* as his *thing*-men. The former leadership of the *goðar*, based on family and friendship, now became territorial, political authority. The *stórgoðar*

gained control over the judicial activities in the district and decided all cases between their *thing*-men at their residential farms. Consequently, the local and regional *things* declined.

The ability of the *stórgoðar* to utilise the economic resources and manpower of their *ríki* were, in the end, the factors that determined whether they would survive in the internal power struggle. They tried to channel various contributions and payments to a centre from which they could be redistributed to achieve political ends. Most often such a centre would be a *staðr* under the management and control of the *stórgoði*, in itself a strong economic power base since it enjoyed the incomes of church lands and tithe.

At the end of the twelfth century Bishop Thorlákr Thórhallsson tried to establish the bishop's authority, *forræði*, over the local churches, primarily the *staðir*, allowing the laymen to continue to administer them and their economy as temporary benefices, *lén*, under his supervision. He had considerable success in the Austfirðir but was effectively resisted by Jón Loptsson of Oddi. After that the lay opposition to his policy gained the upper hand.

Snorri Sturluson (1178/9–1241) is a good example of a chieftain who managed to acquire several *goðorð* and vast economic resources mainly by control over *staðir* and other ecclesiastical institutions. It was in this way that he established his *ríki* centred upon Borgarfjörður. In *Íslendinga saga* his nephew Sturla Thórðarson states that Snorri was not short of economic resources after having gained control of the *staðir* Stafholt and Reykholt in that area. Riches begot riches. The *stórgoðar* could buy more farms, expand their activities, and strengthen their political position. Snorri and his two brothers owned at least ten times as much property as their father, and their power corresponded to their wealth.

The evolution of territorial lordships in the form of *ríki* may be regarded as a stage on the way towards organised statehood. The Icelandic constitution based on *goðar* and *goðorð* was, however, an anomaly. No single chieftain or family had the resources required to gain the upper hand in the internal power struggle and so control the whole country. To increase their strength and prestige the chieftains sought the support of the Norwegian king and became his liegemen in return, and there was also increasing Norwegian influence over the Icelandic church. What is more, the Norwegians had by the early thirteenth century more or less monopolised trade with Iceland and shipping to and from it. It is therefore easy to understand why the medieval Free State was nearing the end of its unique history.

8 (e) Kings and provinces in Sweden

THOMAS LINDKVIST

The territorial unification of Sweden started later and generally progressed more slowly than that of Denmark and Norway; it may be said to have lasted from about AD 1000 to about 1250. Partly because of the scarcity of written evidence it has been customary to regard the whole of this period and the following years to 1319 as the early Middle Ages of Sweden, including most of what in this volume is defined as the central or high Middle Ages of Scandinavia (see Introduction).¹

The core of the medieval kingdom comprised its two main regions, Svealand and Götaland, the most populous and densely settled parts of modern Sweden as they must have been in Swedish prehistory. Kings who, in the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, gained some degree of control over these regions, also began to bring peripheral regions under their authority. In the course of this process political and social structures were transformed. The capacities of kingship expanded and a rudimentary form of public power emerged.

The core of the old Svealand were the districts around Lake Mälaren, whereas Götaland was centred on the plains of Östergötland and Västergötland further south, to the east and west of Lake Vättern respectively. Impenetrable forests divided the two regions from each other. From Tacitus onwards classical and early medieval writers now and then mention peoples or tribes in present-day Sweden, notably *Svear* and *Götar*. These terms should not be interpreted exclusively as names of ethnic groups. The *Svear* are more frequently mentioned in foreign sources than the *Götar* because they were identified

¹ For the following section, see J. Rosén, *Svensk historia*, 1 (Stockholm, 1962), pp. 103–95; P. Sawyer, *The Making of Sweden* (*Occasional Papers in Medieval History*, 1, Alingsås, 1988); T. Lindkvist, *Plundring, skatter och den feodala statens framväxt: Organisatoriska tendenser i Sverige under övergången från vikingatid till tidig medeltid* (*Opuscula historica Upsaliensia*, 1, Uppsala, 1990).

with seaborne military activities. *Svear* could therefore be a term indicating functions or a social group rather than ethnicity.

The scene of the political unification process was in general limited to Svealand and Götaland. The development of new political structures and new forms of lordship followed different lines in the two regions, which partly explains the cultural, social and economic differences between them in the Middle Ages. Systems of measuring land, crops and money varied, as did the royal fiscal organisation.

It has already been demonstrated (Chapter 3) that the rich archaeological and scarce written evidence for the Germanic Iron Age shows that Scandinavian power was divided among numerous chiefdoms and petty kingdoms. Sweden was no exception and there are clear indications that there was an early kingdom in Svealand. In the course of the Viking Age and the early Middle Ages a more complex power structure evolved, including forms of overlordship.

The early kings of the *Svear*

Before AD 1000 kings of the *Svear* were associated with the Lake Mälaren region. Archaeological remains and the later Icelandic tradition of the Swedish (and subsequently Norwegian) royal family of *Ynglingar* indicate that Old Uppsala was an important and distinguished royal centre. Reconstructions of the settlement structure seem to indicate that Uppsala was once a vast royal demesne. Old Uppsala was particularly renowned as a religious centre and the main functions of the pre-Christian kings associated with it were probably cultic; other functions appear to have been rather restricted. There is no evidence of a similar pre-Christian kingship among the *Götar*.²

Some kings in the Lake Mälaren district are mentioned in the later Old Norse-Icelandic literature, and elsewhere as sea kings. These were warrior kings with territories controlled by way of the sea, who plundered and exacted tribute mainly in the Baltic region. In the ninth century there is evidence that kings of the *Svear* demanded tribute in Courland (north-west of the Gulf of Riga).

In the ninth century kings resided on the island of Adelsö, close to the trading port of Birka in Lake Mälaren. They probably protected and controlled the

2 S. Rahmqvist, 'Gamla Uppsala by – Upplands största', in *Från Östra Aros till Uppsala: En samling uppsatser kring det medeltida Uppsala (Uppsala stads historia, 1, Uppsala, 1986)*, pp. 254–71; B. Gräslund, 'Folkvandringstidens Uppsala: Namn, myter, arkeologi och historia', in *Uppland: Upplands fornminnesförening och hembygdsförbunds årsbok (1933)*, pp. 173–208.

exchange of goods in Birka. The centre at Adelsö–Birka may have competed with or replaced Old Uppsala but the authority of the kings may still have been rather restricted; according to *Vita Anskarii* they had to consult public assemblies. However, very little is known about their power and status in society.

Several ninth-century kings of the *Svear* are named in *Vita Anskarii* but after that the first about whom anything definite is known is Erik *Segersäll* ('the Victorious') who died in about 995. The facts surrounding him are, however, contradictory and slight. In the Norse-Icelandic literary tradition he is reported to have won a battle at *Fýrisvellir* in the vicinity of Old Uppsala, in which he defeated his nephew Styrbjörn and the Jomsvikings, but the circumstances leading to this event are obscure. According to Adam of Bremen Erik converted to Christianity in Denmark, but returned to the old faith when he was back in Svealand. Social and political conditions were as yet not favourable for a Christian kingdom in the Mälars region. Erik allied himself with the Polish prince Boleslav against the Danish king Sven Forkbeard and married Boleslav's sister. After Erik's death she was remarried to King Sven. This may indicate that the Danish king exercised some sort of overlordship over his Swedish colleague, which was also his goal in relation to the emerging Norwegian kingdom.

Recent archaeological excavations have led to the conclusion that the town of Sigtuna on the shore of Lake Mälaren was established as a planned settlement in the 970s. It was situated north of Birka–Adelsö, on the waterway leading to Old Uppsala, and must have replaced Adelsö and a declining Birka as a royal residence and an administrative as well as commercial centre.³

King Erik was succeeded by his son Olof, later called *Skötkonung* (c. 995–c. 1020). The by-name is not recorded earlier than the thirteenth century and its meaning is obscure and disputed. It should probably be understood as *skattkonung*, 'tax-king', which may indicate that Olof for a while paid tribute to another king, in that case the Danish Sven Forkbeard with whom he fought against the Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason in AD 1000. Later Olof rejected Danish overlordship and was able to maintain his independence.

There are several traditions, partly contradictory, connected with Olof *Skötkonung* but he is generally associated with the foundation of a Christian kingdom. He was the first king to be baptised in Sweden, at Husaby in Västergötland, and is credited with the establishment of the bishopric of

3 S. Tesch (ed.), *Makt och människor i kungens Sigtuna: Sigtunautgrävningen 1988–90* (Sigtuna, 1990).

Skara in the same province. (cf. Chapter 7). His connection with Sigtuna is documented by coins minted there in his name from the beginning of his reign, the oldest extant indigenous coins of Sweden. In some of the coin inscriptions Olof lays claim to the title of king of *Svear*, *rex sveorum*. The title, and the minting in itself, would seem to imply new regal ambitions and intentions. The character of Olof's kingdom is obscure. He was, however, definitely the first king associated with both Svealand and Götaland, and for that reason has often been regarded as the first king of Sweden.⁴

King Olof was succeeded by his son Anund Jakob (c. 1020–c. 1050) who together with the Norwegian king Olaf Haraldsson fought the battle at the mouth of Helgeå against King Knut in 1026. The location of the battle is uncertain; traditionally it is placed in Skåne, but Uppland too has been suggested.⁵ It appears that the Swedes and Norwegians had control of the battlefield, but this was not sufficient to stem the growing influence of King Knut in Scandinavia. Coins struck in Sigtuna and describing Knut as king of the *Svear* (*REX SW*) have been taken as evidence for the fact that he exercised overlordship there, but this has been contested; the coins in question may just be adaptations of a coin of Knut and not an assertion of his authority in Sigtuna.⁶

A contested kingdom of *Svear* and *Götar*

The kings of Sweden were elected but evidently from particular families. After Anund Jakob his half-brother Emund was accepted as king (c. 1050–c. 1060), but with him the dynasty of Erik *Segersäll* ended. The next king was Stenkil who appears to have enjoyed solid support in Västergötland. Possibly his rule was legitimated by marriage to a daughter of King Emund. Stenkil's dynasty produced several kings, some of them co-regents, such as his sons Inge I (d. 1100) and Halsten (1066–?), and Halsten's sons Inge II (d. c. 1120?) and Filip (d. 1118). Royal power was in this period often contested by pretenders with regional support and the territory of the kingdom was from time to time restricted or divided. In 1081 Pope Gregory VII addressed the kings of the *Götar* (*Wisigothorum*) I. and A., that is, Inge I and probably Halsten. In 1080 King Inge was regarded as the sole king of the *Svear*. The death of Inge II, the last of Stenkil's dynasty, was followed by an interregnum in the 1120s.

4 B. Malmer, *The Sigtuna Coinage c. 995–1005 (Commentationes de nummis saeculorum IX–XI in Suecica repertis)*, Nova series, 4, Stockholm and London, 1989).

5 B. Gräslund, 'Knut den store och sveariket: Slaget vid Helgeå i ny belysning', *Scandia* (1986), pp. 211–38.

6 P. Sawyer, 'Knut, Sweden, and Sigtuna', in S. Tesch (ed.), *Avstamp – för en ny Sigtunaforskning* (Sigtuna, 1989), pp. 89–90, 92.

The period c. 1130–1250 was dominated by two contending dynasties, named after their progenitors: Sverker I (c. 1130–56) and Erik (?– c. 1160), the later St Erik. The kings were now clearly chosen from particular royal families so that the dynastic principle of succession became more or less settled. Nothing is known about the ancestry of either Sverker I or Erik but something is known of their regional attachments. Sverker, who is alleged to have legitimated his kingship by marriage to the widow of Inge I, came from Östergötland whereas Erik's dynasty had its family estates in Västergötland. Erik himself, the only royal saint in Sweden, was assassinated by the Danish pretender Magnus Henriksson in Uppsala, which subsequently became the centre for his cult.

The kings represented the unity of the kingdom, at least formally, but their power was weak. Their reigns were generally short and their deaths usually violent. King Sverker was murdered. St Erik's slayer, Prince Magnus, was defeated by Sverker's son Karl Sverkersson (1161–7); he had apparently been accepted as king in Götaland as early as 1159. Karl in his turn was assassinated – and so were two pretenders of Sverker's dynasty, Kol and Burislev – by St Erik's son Knut (c. 1167–95/6). Knut Eriksson's reign was unusually long and seems to have been relatively stable; coins were again minted and Knut even died a natural death.

After Knut's death Sverker Karlsson, the son of Karl Sverkersson, was elected king (1196–1208). He was, however, defeated and expelled by Knut's son Erik (1208–16) and killed in 1210 when he attempted to regain his kingdom. Erik Knutsson was succeeded by the last member of the rival dynasty, Johan Sverkersson (1216–22). The next king was Erik Eriksson, later nicknamed 'Lisper and Limper' (1222–9, 1234–49), a posthumous son of Erik Knutsson. Following an uprising another descendant of St Erik, Knut Holmgersson Långe, won control of the royal power for a while (1231–4); he seems to have had his support mainly in the Mälars region. After an exile in Denmark Erik returned as king. With him Erik's dynasty ended in the male line. In 1250 Valdemar, the son of Earl Birger Magnusson in his marriage with Erik's sister, was elected king. This was the beginning of a new dynasty and a new era in Swedish history (see Chapter 12(d)).

The title of 'king of *Svear* and *Götar*' is first recorded, for Karl Sverkersson, in the papal bull founding the archbishopric of Uppsala in 1164.⁷ There were great difficulties in maintaining royal rule over both Svealand and Götaland at the same time and the regional support for royal power changed from time to time.

7 O. S. Rydberg (ed.), *Sveriges traktater med främmande magter*, 1 (Stockholm, 1877), no. 43.

The Christian kingdom of Sweden and the social structure associated with it originated mainly in Västergötland and Östergötland, the home provinces of the royal dynasties from about 1060. With the exception of St Erik and the Danish pretender Magnus Henriksson all kings in the following period up to 1250 met their deaths in Götaland. The kings were itinerant, but the castle of Näs on the island of Visingsö in Lake Vättern, strategically situated between Västergötland and Östergötland, was a residence frequently visited by many kings. King Karl Sverkersson was assassinated there in 1167, and both Erik Knutsson and Johan Sverkersson died there.

There is little evidence of the presence of kings in the Mälars region in the early Christian period. We have seen that St Erik was murdered in Uppsala, but apart from that it is not until the reign of his son, Knut Eriksson, that we know of a Christian king exercising some kind of public power in this region, including making donations to monasteries.

Most kings were buried in Götaland. The Cistercian monastery of Alvastra in Östergötland housed the sepulchres of Sverker's dynasty. With the exception of St Erik himself the kings of his dynasty were buried in the Cistercian monastery of Varnhem in Västergötland.

Early political organisation

The kings were supported by and cooperated with other powerful men in the period of the early Christian kingdom. The position of earl (*jarl*) was invested with particular authority from the mid-twelfth century until the death of Earl Birger Magnusson in 1266. In Sweden the title of *jarl* appears at first to have denoted a magnate with a leading position in a district. In the 1130s Karl Sunesson seems to have been earl in the sense that he had a leading position in Västergötland. Already at the beginning of the eleventh century an earl in the same province, Ragnvald Ulfsson, was a mediator in a conflict between the Swedish and Norwegian kings. According to the Icelandic *Hervarar saga* Stenkil was earl in Svealand before he was elected king in about 1060.

Until the early twelfth century there is no reason to suppose that there was only one Swedish earl at the same time, but from the reign of King Knut Eriksson this appears to have been the case. The position of earl became an office, formally subordinate to the king but in practice invested with considerable power. Occasionally the earl would have the title of *jarl* of the *Svear*, which suggests that the earldom was in Svealand, supplementing and possibly

contrasting a kingdom attached mainly to Götaland. The earl probably exercised royal authority in districts where the king was not present but he does not seem to have had a strictly territorial lordship. Some earls are associated with martial and external activities. Earl Guttorm played a role in establishing Swedish hegemony and propagating Christianity in Finland. The earls Birger Brosa, Karl the Deaf and Birger Magnusson are known to have participated in armed conflicts in the eastern Baltic region. Both Birger Brosa and Birger Magnusson concluded commercial treaties with the rising town of Lübeck.

The position of earl was not hereditary but the earls were often related to each other. Earl Birger Brosa (d. 1202) and his nephew Earl Birger Magnusson, *the Birger jarl* of Swedish history, were the most powerful men of their age in Sweden. The latter Birger was the last to bear the title of earl. He belonged to a prominent family in Östergötland and married the sister of King Erik Eriksson. During the reign of the weak Erik Eriksson it was Birger, and before him Earl Ulf Fase, who in practice exercised royal power. The earlship meant as much for the unification process as did the kingship; Earl Birger Brosa had earlier been a stabilising factor in the dynastic conflicts.

Early medieval Sweden has been described as a federation of provinces. Kings, earls and, above all, the Church represented the centripetal tendencies whereas the magnates, chiefs or aristocrats, frequently stood for centrifugal tendencies. The instability of kingship was partly caused by its elective character. The king was, as can be documented from the beginning of the fourteenth century, elected at the *things* of the provinces (*land*); the election and the royal oath was repeated in each *landsting* according to a fixed itinerary that covered the central regions of Svealand and Götaland but excluded Norrland, Gotland and Finland. This itinerary is known as the *Erikskata*; its age and origins are, however, obscure.

Royal counsellors are mentioned as early as the first half of the thirteenth century. In 1225 a small number of *consilarii* acted collectively during the minority of King Erik Eriksson but a regular royal council was not established until the end of the thirteenth century. The institutional framework of politics was rudimentary and had a very informal character before the mid-thirteenth century. Other offices than that of the earl appear, but only occasionally. Within the royal retinue specialised functions evolved. Some bishops were chancellors, possibly from the end of the twelfth century. Bishop Kol of Linköping is in later sources mentioned as royal chancellor in about 1220 and Bishop Bengt of Skara was called chancellor in 1225. But a central administration and fixed political

institutions do not appear in the sources until the end of the thirteenth century.⁸

The role of the Church

The tendencies towards political unification and a more centralised political organisation were closely connected with Christianisation and the establishment of a Swedish church. The conversion to Christianity was an integral element in the consolidation of kingship and in political history in general. The Christian kingdom and the gradual building up of an ecclesiastical organisation brought with it the development of a political structure that strove to control Swedish territory more effectively.⁹

We have seen that the first permanent episcopal see was probably founded by Olof Skötkonung in Västergötland and transferred to Skara in the mid-eleventh century (Chapter 7) and the second one was established in about 1100 in Linköping in Östergötland. The cooperation and mutual support between kings and bishops were significant, particularly in the case of the see of Linköping. In the early 1120s six Swedish episcopal sees are named; apart from Skara and Linköping they were all situated in the Mälars region and it is likely that at least some of them were primarily centres for missionary activity.¹⁰

In the sources Svealand, in particular Old Uppsala, is represented as a stronghold of the traditional religion until the end of the eleventh century. Adam of Bremen stresses, clearly with some exaggeration, the contrast between the Christian (and royal) Sigtuna and the pagan Uppsala. According to later tradition pagan cults were celebrated at Uppsala until about 1080. The Christian king Inge I is said to have been expelled when he refused to carry out the traditional sacrifice that was central to pre-Christian kingship. Thereafter his brother-in-law, Sven, was king at Uppsala for three years before Christianity triumphed.¹¹

The paganism of Uppsala and the surrounding province of Uppland should not be exaggerated. It has already been demonstrated (Chapter 7) that

8 K. B. Westman, *Svenska rådets utveckling till år 1306* (Stockholm, 1904); H. Schück, 'Kansler och capella regis under folkungatiden', *Historisk tidskrift* (Stockholm, 1963), pp. 133–87.

9 On the Christianisation of Sweden, see B. Nilsson (ed.), *Kristnandet i Sverige: Gamla källor och nya perspektiv* (Projektet Sveriges kristnande: Publikationer, 5, Uppsala, 1997).

10 J. A. Hellström, *Biskop och landskapssamhälle i tidig svensk medeltid* (Stockholm, 1971), pp. 44–86.

11 G. Turville Petre (ed.), *Hervarar saga ok Heidreks* (Viking Society for Northern Research: Text series, 2, London, 1956), ch. 6.

numerous eleventh-century runic inscriptions testify to a widespread and well-established reception of Christianity in Uppland. But that did not prevent resistance to the developing and more centralised political power represented by the kingdom and the Church. From the 1140s there was an episcopal see in Uppsala, and when a separate Swedish church province was finally established in 1164 its metropolitan see was placed there. The fact that the archbishopric of Uppsala comprised the bishoprics of Götaland as well as Svealand strengthened the unity of the kingdom.

Public power was expressed in new ways in the Christian kingdom. Specific royal churches are a good example. Thus, the churches of Husaby in Västergötland and Örberga in Östergötland, both probably from the early twelfth century, have massive west towers with prominent galleries for the ceremonial appearance of the kings, a manifestation of the new royal authority. The prototypes of such 'west works' are found in Westphalia.

By the act of coronation the Church gave divine sanction to the royal status, but this ceremony was introduced in Sweden later than in Norway and Denmark (see Chapters 12(b) and 12(c)). The first Swedish king known to have been crowned was Erik Knutsson in 1210. This is one of the signs that the religious authorisation of what the Church regarded as a royal office established by God was for a long time not emphasised in Sweden. Likewise, the cult of the royal Swedish saint, Erik, was rather restricted, at least as compared with his Norwegian counterpart Olaf, which may partly have been due to the rivalry between the dynasties. St Erik was originally more a patron of the diocese of Uppsala than of the kingdom. He was not promoted to the role of Sweden's national patron until the late Middle Ages. In the period treated here, up to 1250, the possibilities of establishing a commonly recognised cult that expressed the unity of the kingdom were restricted.¹²

With the exception of the Benedictines of the abbey of Vreta in Östergötland, probably founded by King Inge I and his queen, the monastic culture was not introduced in Sweden until the mid-twelfth century.¹³ In 1143 the first Cistercian monasteries were established at Alvastra in Östergötland and at Nydala in Småland, both of them in the bishopric of Linköping. Alvastra was founded by King Sverker I and his queen, Ulfhild, and Nydala by Bishop Gisle, who was closely allied to Sverker's dynasty. In the provinces of Götaland the new

12 N. Ahnlund, 'Den nationella och folkliga Erikskulten', in B. Thordeman (ed.), *Erik den helige: Historia, kult, relikier* (Stockholm, 1954), pp. 109–54.

13 N. Ahnlund, 'Vreta klostets äldsta donatorer', *Historisk tidskrift* (Stockholm, 1945), pp. 301–45.

Cistercian monasteries that were established in the following years were in general royal foundations, whereas in Svealand the founders and benefactors were earls and other magnates. The Cistercians probably strengthened the authority of the monarchy.

The legal and economic foundations of kingship

The royal power and control of land and people increased. Generally the conditions for strengthening the institutions of the kingdom were more favourable in Götaland than in Svealand.

Control of the legal and judicial system was of paramount importance for the growth of royal power but little is known of this system before the days of Earl Birger Magnusson. Earlier it appears that legislation and jurisdiction were mainly in the hands of the local aristocracy and/or the local communities. The legislative capacity of kingship was limited. There are no allusions to St Erik or other kings as legislators before the late thirteenth century. In Västergötland a version of the provincial law code can be dated to the first half of the thirteenth century. According to a later tradition the person behind this enterprise was the *lagman* ('lawman' or law-speaker) of Västergötland, Eskil Magnusson (d. c. 1227), brother of Earl Birger Magnusson. But the legislation and its recording in writing must have taken place after his time.

Swedish legislation above the provincial level is not known until the peace legislation of Earl Birger Magnusson, called *edsöre* ('oath-confirmed') legislation because the king and the leading men of the kingdom solemnly swore to uphold the peace of the land. The *edsöre* legislation of Earl Birger is not extant in its original form but is referred to in later provincial law codes. Its aim was to restrain the feuds within the social élite, the emerging aristocracy.

The kings acquired the right to exact fines for violations of the law but their judicial capacity is unknown. One old prerogative was the *danaarv*, the king's right to property left by a deceased person without known heirs, normally a foreigner. The fines for *dulgradrâp* (manslaughter by an unknown perpetrator) was another early royal right. In such cases fines should be paid by the individual or the community on whose land the body was found.

The right to demand regular contributions from the population was the most important economic prerogative of lordship in medieval society. The early fiscal system of Sweden is but imperfectly known. The Church was innovative; the earliest known permanent tax was the tithe. It was demanded

as early as the late eleventh century but was not generally accepted until the thirteenth century.

Fiscal exactions by the kingdom were also in the making, although rather modest. By the twelfth century the kings had acquired the right of taxation. Some taxes of obscure origins and age, the *allmänningsöre* and the *ättargäld*, may be early but are only mentioned in late sources. It is from the provincial law codes, mainly from the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries, that the legal basis of the principal taxes can be reconstructed.

We have seen that the early medieval kings were itinerant. The obligation to give hospitality to and sustain the king and his retinue was regulated and converted into a duty. Fines for neglecting this duty and payments when it was not demanded paved the way for regular, annual taxes. These were the principal taxes in Västergötland and Östergötland, the domestic provinces of the kings. In Östergötland some taxes were also based on the right to common land that kings acquired.¹⁴

In the Mälars region taxes from the late thirteenth century had their origins in other commutations. The duty to contribute men, ships and provisions to the king's *leding*, corresponding to the Danish *leding* and the Norwegian *leidang*, was converted into a regular tax. The *leding* is mainly known from the provincial law codes, that is, from the period when it was transformed into a fiscal duty. But it must have originated in the trading and plundering expeditions of the local magnates of the Mälars region. In the mid-twelfth and the early thirteenth centuries maritime expeditions to the eastern shores of the Baltic were led by kings or earls who often resided in Östergötland. For instance, the *Chronicle of Novgorod* reports that in 1142 a Swedish 'prince' (an earl or a king) and a bishop led an unsuccessful expedition to the estuary of the river Neva, and there was a new Swedish assault in 1164. In 1219 King Johan Sverkersson, Bishop Karl of Linköping, and Earl Karl the Deaf led a campaign to Estonia. A Swedish stronghold was established at Leal, but lost in the following year.¹⁵

The royal demesne was an important source of wealth. From the mid-twelfth century a distinction was made between the possessions of the royal family and the demesne of the kingdom as an institution. The latter was termed *Uppsala öd* (cf. ON *auðr*, 'wealth'). Its extent and origins are obscure.

14 E. Lönnroth, *Statsmakt och statsfinans i det medeltida Sverige: Studier över skatteväsen och länsförvaltning* (Göteborg, 1940), pp. 57–136; C. G. Andræ, *Kyrka och frälse i Sverige under äldre medeltid* (Uppsala, 1960), pp. 111–45.

15 A. Bauer (ed.), *Heinrich von Livland: Livländische Chronik (Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters, 24, Darmstadt, 1975)*, ch. XXIV:3.

Some of the farms had obviously been confiscated from opposing and defeated magnates. The so-called *husabyar* (farms distinguished by their houses) were particularly important; they were in general large and ancient farms, centrally located in their districts. In the Mälars region there was a regular system of *husabyar* in the charge of royal stewards and the system, though less consistent, is also known from the provinces of Götaland. Even if the farms in question were often very old the term *husaby* and the system may not have been introduced until the twelfth century. In the thirteenth century the system was more or less abandoned and many *husabyar* were donated to ecclesiastical institutions. From the mid-thirteenth century a new and more efficient administrative system, centred mainly on castles and fortified houses, was developed.¹⁶

A geographically expanding kingdom

The rise of the kingdom in alliance with the Church involved the incorporation of other regions than Svealand and Götaland. Finland became a part of the Swedish realm as Swedes began to colonise the coastal Finnish regions from the mid-twelfth century. In the late twelfth and the first part of the thirteenth centuries Finland was gradually drawn into the Swedish political and ecclesiastical sphere.

In his legend, dating from the end of the thirteenth century, St Erik is reported to have led the so-called first crusade to Finland proper (the south-western coastal area of present-day Finland) in the 1150s, a tradition that is linked with the legend of the missionary bishop and martyr Henrik. The historicity of the crusade is questionable but parts of Finland were certainly occupied and converted then. In the late twelfth century the episcopal see at Nousis in south-western Finland was a missionary centre. From the 1220s a permanent episcopal see existed in Finland; it was by 1290 located in Turku (Åbo).¹⁷

Norrland, the north of Sweden, is a vast area; it was sparsely settled in the Middle Ages, as it still is. Early settlements were situated along the coast and the rivers. Several royal and ecclesiastical strongholds were established. But, as was the case in Finland, the incorporation of Norrland into the kingdom and

16 S. U. Palme, 'Hövitsmän och husabymän', *Scandia* (1958), pp. 139–66.

17 K. Mikander (ed.), *Kring korstågen till Finland* (Helsingfors, 1968); P. O. Sjöstrand, 'Den tidigmedeltida statsbildningsprocessen och den östra halvan', *Historisk tidskrift för Finland* (1994), pp. 530–73.

the establishment there of an administration was carried out by the Church rather than by royal authority.

The island of Gotland was but weakly associated with the kingdom of Sweden. The island had a unique and autonomous position in the economic exchange system of the Viking Age and was later incorporated into the bishopric of Linköping and the Swedish kingdom. According to the tradition of the *Guta saga*, a partly legendary history from the late thirteenth century, the inhabitants of Gotland at some unstated time in the past recognised the overlordship of the Swedish king and earl by paying an annual tribute. Gotland remained in a semi-independent position; the rights of the bishop of Linköping, for instance, were more restricted than on the mainland.¹⁸

The development of a new political system required an administration and new types of communities on the local level. The parish evolved as the primary ecclesiastical community with settled duties and rights. The parochial system was created over a long period and there were important regional variations. In general the division into parishes was the result of the Christianisation and the establishment of the Church, and does not reflect pre-Christian local organisation. However, the parochial system developed differently when churches were built by local magnates and when they were established by peasant communities. If, as seems likely, the first churches in Götaland, particularly in Västergötland, were built by local leading men the parochial system there reflects petty lordships. Further north, especially in Norrland, the parish had its origins in the more egalitarian neighbourhood communities of that region.¹⁹

The tendencies towards political unification did not only imply a territorial expansion of the kingdom with the incorporation or at least affiliation of new regions. They also involved the building up of new competence in society. Clearly the conditions for a qualitative transformation of the kingdom were more favourable in the Götaland provinces, notably in Östergötland, than they were in Svealand. The social structure of the Mälars region conflicted with that of Östergötland. The *folkungar*, a group of magnates partly linked by kinship, resisted the monarchy represented by Earl Birger and his dynasty. They were mainly associated with Uppland but had a stronghold in Västergötland too. According to a much quoted annal the *folkungar* were defeated by King Erik Eriksson at Sparrsätra in 1247 and thereafter several obligations were imposed

¹⁸ H. Yrwing, *Gotland under äldre medeltid* (Lund, 1940), pp. 47–68.

¹⁹ S. Brink, 'Sockenbildningen i Sverige', in O. Ferm (ed.), *Kyrka och socken i medeltidens Sverige* (Stockholm, 1991), pp. 113–42.

upon the peasant community of Uppland. The victory enabled the monarchy, represented by Earl Birger Magnusson, to establish a firmer control over the Mälär region, which in the second half of the thirteenth century became the main basis of a more centralised and firmly organised kingdom.²⁰

20 S. Bolin, 'Folkungarna: En terminologisk och historiografisk undersökning', *Scandia* (1935), pp. 210–42; E. Lönnroth, 'De äkta folkungarnas program', *Humanistiska vetenskapssamfundet i Uppsala: Årsbok* (1944).

PART III

*

MATERIAL GROWTH
(to c. 1350)

Demographic conditions

OLE JØRGEN BENEDICTOW

In the Viking Age and the Middle Ages the vast majority of people in the Nordic countries were peasants or people who worked within the framework of the peasant economy.¹ The first clear tendencies towards urbanisation are discernible from the late eighth century. In the ninth century Ribe, Hedeby, Birka and Skiringssal/Kaupang may have had a total of 3,000–5,000 inhabitants.² At the end of the tenth century urban development entered a new and vigorous phase (see Chapter 11). The number of towns grew rapidly, especially in Denmark, but with a few exceptions they remained quite small, counting their permanent inhabitants in hundreds or low thousands. Probably only a handful of Scandinavian towns had more than 5,000 inhabitants during the Middle Ages.³ No towns developed in Iceland or Føroyar. Roughly estimated, Viking Age urban populations barely exceeded 0.5 per cent of the total population in any Nordic country. At the end of the high Middle Ages this proportion may have increased to about 3 per cent in Sweden and Norway; only in Denmark may it have exceeded 5 per cent.

¹ This short outline of Nordic demography in the Viking Age and the high Middle Ages is a much abbreviated version of my paper 'The demography of the Viking Age and the High Middle Ages in the Nordic countries', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 21:3 (1996), pp. 151–82. Apart from this paper the only modern comprehensive introduction to medieval Scandinavian demography is O. J. Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System of the Nordic Countries*, 2nd edn (Oslo, 1996).

² I. Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Oldtid og Vikingetid', in A. E. Christensen et al., *Danmarks historie*, 1 (København, 1977), pp. 114–17; A. E. Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', *ibid.*, pp. 318–20; P. Sveaas Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge og kristningen av landet 800–1130 (Handbok i Norges historie*, 2, Bergen, 1977), pp. 222–9; B. Almgren, 'Städer och handelsplatser', in *Den svenska historien*, 1 (Stockholm, 1966), p. 164; G. A. Blom (ed.), *Urbaniseringsprosessen i Norden*, 1 (Oslo, 1977).

³ Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Oldtid og Vikingetid', pp. 142–5; A. E. Christensen, 'Über die Entwicklung der dänischen Städte von der Wikingerzeit bis zum 13. Jahrhundert', in M. Stenberger (ed.), *Die Zeit der Stadtgründung im Osteseeraum* (Uppsala, 1965), pp. 166–72; Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', pp. 318–20; Blom (ed.), *Urbaniseringsprosessen i Norden*, 1; L. Törnblom, 'Medeltiden', in *Finlands historia*, pp. 376–9; Sveaas Andersen, *Samlingen av Norge*, pp. 227–30; K. Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt* (Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norges historie*, 3, Oslo, 1995), pp. 86–8.

After the establishment of Christian church organisations the clergy came to constitute a social class of its own, and in the course of the high Middle Ages the secular aristocracy of the three Scandinavian kingdoms developed into a privileged nobility in the service of the Crown. These two social élites reached their highest numbers at the end of the high Middle Ages when they may have constituted roughly 2–3 per cent of the population: 1–2 per cent for the nobility and 0.75–1 per cent for the clergy. It should, however, be stressed that these figures are only tentative.

What is beyond doubt is the fact that the rural classes constituted the overwhelming majority of all the Scandinavian populations in the Viking Age. In about 1300 they probably still comprised about 95 per cent of the total population.

Life expectancy and mortality

Osteologists and osteo-archaeologists have provided new and invaluable data which can be used by historical demographers to provide information on life expectancy and mortality. In most cases, the main problem is a significant, even gross, deficit of children.⁴

Danish and Norwegian osteological studies on sizable Iron Age skeletal materials consistently show mean life expectancy at age twenty of only 15–18 years.⁵ Today, in the Nordic countries, life expectancy at age twenty is about 55 years, at age sixty about 18 years. The vital data on Iron Age populations also indicate that long-run life-expectancy rates and mortality may not have changed significantly between the early Iron Age and the Viking Age.

Life expectancy at birth must have been much lower. One should note that even in the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries infant mortality was around 250 per thousand, and that about a quarter of surviving infants died before reaching the age of fifteen.⁶ If infant and child mortality

4 These data involve a number of methodological problems which, for reasons of space, cannot be discussed here. They are presented and discussed in Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*.

5 B. J. Sellevold et. al., *Iron Age Man in Denmark* (Nordiske Fortidsminder, Ser. B, 8, København, 1984), pp. 207–8, 214; P. Holck, *Cremated Bones: A Medical-Anthropological Study of an Archaeological Material on Cremation Burials* (Antropologiske skrifter, 1, Oslo, 1986), pp. 56, 102–11; personal communication from Holck relating to a forthcoming paper on his study of the large skeletal material excavated in the Iron Age burial ground at Møllegaard in Fyn (Denmark).

6 K. Mykland, *Gjennom nødsår og krig 1648–1720*, in K. Mykland (ed.), *Norges historie*, 7, (Oslo, 2nd edn 1988), p. 154; S. Dyrvik, *Den lange fredstiden 1720–1784*, in Mykland (ed.),

Table 9.1 *Mean age at death for adults (age 20+) in Denmark in the Iron Age. Life expectancy at age 20 = e_{20} minus 20 years.*

Period	All adults		Men		Women	
	n	e_{20}	n	e_{20}	n	e_{20}
Early Roman	262	37.8	120	39.2	62	37.5
Late Roman	139	37.6	60	39.4	44	36.1
Viking Age	242	38.0	70	39.2	68	41.3
Iron Age	643	37.8	250	39.2	174	38.6

Source: Based on B. J. Sellevold et al. *Iron Age Man in Denmark* (Nordiske Fortidsminder, Ser. B., 8, København, 1984), pp. 207, 209.

rates in the Iron Age were the same, a normal level of life expectancy at birth of around twenty years is indicated. The complete or representative medieval cemetery populations discussed below suggest even higher rates of infant and child mortality.

According to the study of Danish non-cremated skeletal remains, Viking Age adult females had somewhat higher life expectancy at age twenty than adult males, 41.3 and 39.2 years respectively (see Table 9.1).⁷ However, in the Iron Age as a whole (including the Viking Age) men had higher mean life expectancy than women, 39.2 and 38.6 years respectively. In two studies of cremated bones, life expectancy for males and females at age twenty was 38 years and 35 years in the first case, 37 years and 34 years in the second case.⁸ In the light of this evidence, the deviant result, higher life expectancy for women than for men in the Viking Age, may have been caused by a particularly high level of warlike activity in this period. Lower life expectancy for women than for men can be explained by mortality caused by frequent pregnancies, childbirths and their after-effects in societies which practise universal and early marriage of women.⁹ This is a characteristic feature of societies with very high

Norges historie, 8, (Oslo, 2nd edn 1988), p. 78; S. Dyrvik, 'Befolkningsutviklinga 1700–1850', in S. Dyrvik et al., *Norsk økonomisk historie 1500–1850* (Bergen, 1979), p. 127; S. Dyrvik, '1536–1814', in R. Danielsen et al., *Grunntrekk i norsk historie fra vikingtid til våre dager* (Oslo, 1991), p. 115; E. Ladewig Petersen, *Fra standssamfund til rangsamfund 1500–1700* (Dansk socialhistorie, 3, København, 1981), pp. 94–6.

⁷ That both figures are higher than the mean of the whole material reflects the fact that the age-determined but not sexable individuals had lower life expectancy.

⁸ Holck, *Cremated Bones*; personal communication from Holck on the material from Møllegaard, Fyn (cf. n. 5).

⁹ Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*, pp. 56–75; U. Högberg et al., 'Maternal deaths in medieval Sweden: an osteological and life table analysis', *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 19 (1987), pp. 495–503.

Table 9.2 Age-distribution at death, Frösön, 1035–1350, unrevised cemetery data

Locality →		Frösön	
Cohort ↓	Age	No.	per cent
Infans	0–1	113	31.0
Infans I	1–6	70	19.3
Infans II	7–13	27	7.4
Juvenilis	14–19	15	4.1
Adultus	20–39	69	18.9
Maturus	40–59	65	17.9
Senilis	60+	5	1.4

Source: N.-G. Gejvall, *Westerhus: Medieval Population and Church in the Light of Skeletal Remains* (Lund, 1960).

mortality which must be compensated by very high fertility in order to ensure the survival of (local) society.

Information on the vital structures in the early and high Middle Ages is furnished mainly by two osteo-archaeological studies of rural skeletal populations excavated in cemeteries which were used from the eleventh century.

N.-G. Gejvall's study of the cemetery at Västerhus on Frösön, an island in Lake Storsjön in the province of Jämtland is considered particularly important (see Table 9.2).¹⁰ Jämtland is a vast area, comprising 37,500 sq. km, the size of modern Denmark. It was extremely thinly populated in the Middle Ages; at the time of the medieval population maximum, around 1300, it contained about 1,130 peasant holdings¹¹ with, probably, about 5,600 persons in all. Thus, population density was roughly 0.15 person per square kilometre. Settlement consisted of small and widely dispersed peasant communities which were little affected by migration.¹² On the basis of anatomical–genetical observations Gejvall concluded that the cemetery population of Västerhus was homogeneous and consisted of successive generations of a small number of biologically related families.

In the Viking Age and the high Middle Ages three or four named farms were cleared on Frösön; some of them were divided so that probably five or

¹⁰ N.-G. Gejvall, *Westerhus: Medieval Population and Church in the Light of Skeletal Remains* (Lund, 1960).

¹¹ H. Salvesen, 'Jord i Jemtland: Bosetningshistoriske og økonomiske studier i grenseland ca. 1200–1650' (doctoral thesis, University of Trondheim, Östersund, 1979), p. 158.

¹² C. H. Siven, 'On reconstructing the (once) living population from osteological age data', *International Journal of Anthropology*, 6 (1991), pp. 111–18.

six holdings were in operation at the time of maximum settlement.¹³ This implies that the community's population increased from about 15–20 persons to 25–30 persons. The cemetery appears to have been established as early as 1035–40,¹⁴ and was in continuous use until the settlement was abandoned shortly after the Black Death. The cemetery appears to be quite complete (also with respect to infants and young children). However, it contains a few more adult women than men. Hunting played an important role in the inhabitants' economic life, and the deficit of adult men may reflect the fact that some of them perished away from home.

This, then, is a cemetery that presumably reflects quite accurately the process of living and dying in this small peasant community. Gejvall estimated the mean life expectancy at birth for the whole population to be 17.7 years, and certainly not more than twenty years. The overriding cause for this very low mean life expectancy was very high infant and child mortality; half of all the children were dead before the age of seven.

Elderly people over the age of sixty constitute only 1.4 per cent of the skeletal population. This appears to be a regular feature: in two urban studies of skeletal populations excavated in Tønsberg and Trondheim (Nidaros) the proportions of dead aged over sixty are 2.1 per cent and 1.7 per cent respectively. Substantial under-representation of infants and young children¹⁵ implies that the proportions of elderly people really were even lower, much on a par with the evidence from Frösön. Mortality took a heavy toll also of the adult population: altogether, persons who reached the age of twenty could, on an average, expect to live only another 15–18 years, much as in the Iron Age.

This means that marriages were often broken early by the death of one spouse, and that widows and widowers often remarried rapidly to reconstitute a functioning socio-economic unit. Families would therefore typically contain children of diverse backgrounds, and the number of children would represent far more marriages than those actually in operation at any one time. Thus, while families would rarely contain a grandparent, family size would be significantly enlarged by the presence of children who were the fruit of marriages broken by death and redistributed in new conjugal alliances.

¹³ Salvesen, 'Jord i Jemtland', p. 144.

¹⁴ N.-G. Gejvall, 'Early medieval church at Westerhus in the light of C¹⁴ collagen datings', in A. W. Mårtensson (ed.), *Res Mediaevalis Archaeologica Lundensia*, 3 (Lund, 1968), pp. 136–40.

¹⁵ P. Holck, *Skjelettmaterialet fra Peterskirken, Tønsberg: En antropologisk rapport* (Oslo, 1987); T. Anderson, 'The churchyard in the Folkebibliotekstomt (Library Site), Trondheim: An interim osteological report', in *Fortiden i Trondheim bygrunn: Folkebibliotekstomten, Meddelelser*, 2 (Trondheim, 1986); Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*, pp. 29–36.

The other churchyard that has yielded evidence of demographic conditions in the early and high Middle Ages is the one at Löddeköpinge in Skåne; it was used from some time in the first half of the eleventh century until about 1150, and excavations have so far yielded 1,412 individual skeletal remains.¹⁶ The osteo-archaeologist Jesper Boldsen emphasises that the skeletal population found here exhibits the characteristic features of the process of mortality in a stable agrarian community: 'The distribution of age at death at Löddeköpinge is incompatible with the cemetery being primarily the burial ground of a marketplace. Furthermore, the morphological variation in the Löddeköpinge population indicates a stable and homogeneous community.'

Mean life expectancy at age ten in the Löddeköpinge material is 28 years. Boldsen points out that probably only 50 per cent of all children born would reach the age of ten. More than half of these deaths would occur among infants (age 0–1) and as many as 40 per cent of the infants would die within the first month after their birth.¹⁷ This indicates that mean life expectancy at birth in Löddeköpinge was around twenty years in the period c. 1025–1150. If we interpolate the mortality rates of infants and children in the Nordic countries in the early Modern Period (see above) average life expectancy would still only be 20–25 years and quite probably in the lower reaches of that range. Average annual mortality rate for the population in Löddeköpinge above age ten was 3.6 per cent, and for the whole population probably 4.5–5 per cent.

Sex was determined for all individuals older than nineteen, the age when this can be done with high accuracy. Mortality rates were markedly higher for women than for men in the cohorts of ages 20–40; with older people this difference disappeared. This is a normal pattern which clearly indicates that the high death rate among women was caused by a high rate of pregnancies and childbirths.¹⁸

Because of small numbers or short time-spans, only three other skeletal studies can be considered to be significant in the perspective provided by the studies of Västerhus and Löddeköpinge. About 40 miles south-east of Löddeköpinge the town of Lund emerged in the eleventh century. Two cemeteries established during the early phase of urbanisation have been excavated, one in the site of the PKbank and used between 1050 and 1100, another in the old part

16 H. Cinthio and J. Boldsen, 'Patterns of distribution in the early medieval cemetery at Löddeköpinge', *Meddelanden från Lunds universitets historiska museum*, new series, 5 (1983–84), pp. 115–27; J. Boldsen, 'Palaeodemography of two southern Scandinavian medieval communities', *ibid.*, p. 111.

17 E. A. Wrigley, 'Mortality in pre-industrial England: the example of Colyton, Devon, over three centuries', *Dædalus*, 97 (1968), pp. 564–70.

18 Boldsen, 'Palaeodemography', pp. 105–15.

of the cemetery of St Stefan's used between 1050 and 1110.¹⁹ The combined skeletal population consists of some 260–300 individuals which could be age-determined; in addition, about 180 individuals above the age of fourteen or fifteen could also be sexed. Mean life expectancy at age twenty was 15 (St Stefan's) and 14 years (PKbank). If we interpolate a mortality regime in which 50 per cent of all children died before the age of ten to fifteen years, and correct for a substantial immigration of adolescents and adults, we can again discern a society where mean life expectancy at birth was around twenty years.

According to the PKbank material, men lived significantly longer than women, 31.3 and 28.8 years respectively; according to the St Stefan's material, women lived slightly longer than men, 26.8 years and 26.2 years respectively. This difference is caused by the fact that the PKbank material contained far more female than male adolescents, although there was a considerable excess of men in all adult cohorts. Early marriage among young adolescent girls, who often would not be physiologically and anatomically ready for childbearing, resulted in significant early maternal reproduction-related supermortality in these cohorts. This again constitutes the main explanation for the shorter life expectancy of women. Characteristically, particularly high female mortality disappears after the age of forty, when women's reproductive role ceased.²⁰

There is literary evidence for universal and early marriage of women; the Icelandic family sagas do 'not mention a single old maid'.²¹ In addition, the usual age at marriage for females was 14–16 years, and they were normally married before the age of 19;²² however, marriage also occurred at the age of twelve, without any indication that this was considered exceptional or improper. Early age at marriage for females is also indicated by passages in the succession laws of high medieval codes of law.²³

Overall, it appears, on the basis of the osteo-archaeological studies of cemeteries, that life expectancy at the age of twenty in the early and high Middle

19 E. Persson and O. Persson, 'Medeltidsfolket från kvarteret Repslagaren', in A. W. Mårtensson (ed.), *St Stefan i Lund: Ett monument ur tiden* (Lund, 1981), pp. 151–70; O. Persson, 'Undersökning av människoskelett', in A. W. Mårtensson (ed.), *Uppgrävt förflutet för PKbanken i Lund: En investering i arkeologi* (Lund, 1976), pp. 171–4.

20 Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*, pp. 56–75. A third much smaller skeletal population, but exhibiting the same main characteristics, is presented by K. Bröste in 'Skeletfundene fra den middelalderlige Rundbygning i Malling', *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie* (1945), pp. 156–66.

21 R. Frank, 'Marriage in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland', *Viator*, 4 (1973), p. 475.

22 J. V. Sigurðsson, 'Forholdet mellom frender, hushold og venner på Island i fristatstiden', *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Oslo, 1995), p. 321; G. Jacobsen, 'Sexual irregularities in medieval Scandinavia', in V. L. Bullough and J. Brundage (eds.), *Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church* (Buffalo, N.Y., 1982), p. 80; R. Keyser and P. A. Munch (eds.), *Norges Gamle Love indtil 1387*, 1 (Christiania, 1846), p. 231.

23 S. Lindal, 'Ægteskab', *KLMN*, 20 (Oslo, 1976), col. 495.

Ages was normally about 15–18 years, and that life expectancy at birth was about 18–23 years. Life expectancy of females appears to have been significantly lower than for males in all cohorts in which the health of women is affected by pregnancies and childbirth. Early age at marriage for females is indicated by extra high mortality of adolescent females, by written sources, and by the very high level of mortality among infants and young children which reflects a correspondingly high fertility.

It is almost impossible to discern any difference between survival rates and mortality rates for various age groups levels in Iron Age and early and high medieval populations. One might have expected that increasing population density, international communication by sea, and inland movement of goods and tradesmen – by peasants on their way to markets, by pilgrims and others – would have increased the spread of epidemic diseases and raised mortality. On the other hand, the reduction and eventual disappearance of slavery probably improved the lot of the lowest stratum of society.

Mean life expectancy at birth appears to have been 10–15 years shorter in the Viking Age and the Middle Ages than in 1750 when it was probably about 35 years. This implies that the transition from medieval to early modern society involved substantial and qualitative changes of demographic structures. In recent years environmental archaeologists have provided new and rather disconcerting glimpses of everyday Viking Age and medieval life in Norway and the Norse communities of the Atlantic. The quality of housing was very poor, and so was hygiene; people obviously lived in grossly insanitary conditions. Consequently, infection rates were high, especially among children, which in turn affected morbidity and mortality rates. Many of these conditions improved in the early Modern Period, resulting in a marked increase in life expectancy.²⁴

The Reformation in the Nordic countries also led to the abolition of fasting, which was practised far more comprehensively and rigorously in the Middle Ages than by the Catholic Church today; fasting days and periods constituted between one-third and one-half of the year. Severe fasting on this scale in a very poor population must have undermined the health of many people, especially pregnant and nursing women, nurslings, adolescents and elderly people.²⁵

24 This subject is discussed quite extensively by Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*, pp. 77–88, 90–1, 233–6; Benedictow, 'The demography', pp. 165–70; O. J. Benedictow, 'Den epidemiologiske transisjonen og bekjempelsen av pesten', *Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association*, 114 (30/1994), pp. 3587–93.

25 O. J. Benedictow, 'The Milky Way in history: breast feeding, antagonism between the sexes and infant mortality in medieval Norway', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 10 (1985), pp. 43–9.

Table 9.3 *Composition and size of the simple family household around 1300*

Household composition	Mean number	Per cent
Male (step)parent	0.93	
Female (step)parent	0.87	42.5
Children below age 15	1.91	45.0
Unmarried youth	0.32	7.5
Grand parents	0.21	5.0
Total	4.24	100.0

Source: O. J. Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System of the Nordic Countries*, 2nd edn (Oslo, 1996), pp. 161–72.

Co-residential types: family and household

The type and size of co-residential units are fundamentally important demographic structures. In a stationary population, all families, whatever their fate, will on average raise 2.1 children who reach adult age. Generally, at any one time, all spouses in a normal population will only have completed an average of two-thirds of their child-rearing efforts, and will thus have an average of 1.4 children. In societies shaped by the high mortality revealed by Nordic osteologists and osteo-archaeologists in Iron Age and early/high medieval Scandinavia, families would on average also take care of roughly 0.75 offspring from previous marriages by one or both of the spouses, a small but significant fraction of whom would be redistributed orphans. In other words, almost one-third of all offspring would have one step-parent, and some would be orphaned and taken care of by non-parental (but often biologically related) families.

These averages conceal the fact that many spouses died before their own reproduction had been secured; on the other hand, spouses who survived their fertile period would often enjoy considerable reproductive success. If we assume some population growth – for example an average of 1.5 children per marriage at any one time and 2.25 surviving children per family – the basic family unit (the conjugal/nuclear family) would be composed much as in Table 9.3.²⁶ According to this composite estimate, the mean size of a simple family household occupying a usual Scandinavian holding around 1300 would be c. 4.25 persons. This average would be slightly increased, to about 4.5 persons, by a modest element of living-in servants and lodgers and by the infrequent occurrence of joint (biologically related) or multiple (unrelated)

²⁶ Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*, pp. 161–72.

families. This corresponds well with what we know about the size of households in other European countries.

It is generally assumed that sub-tenancies ('undersettles') were rare in medieval Scandinavia. Icelandic sources suggest a significant but relatively small incidence of joint and multiple families.²⁷ In Finland, joint and multiple families were quite frequent in some districts in the early Modern Period, but there is no significant evidence for them in the Middle Ages, although it is likely that there were quite a few such families towards the end of that period.²⁸

One important demographic aspect of slavery is that it enlarges the mean household size, which may therefore have been quite large in the Viking Age when quite high proportions of the Nordic population may have been slaves – in Norway possibly between one-fifth and one-quarter around 1030.²⁹ Given the latter estimate, an average household size of 5.5–6 persons seems reasonable in Norway at that time. The gradual disappearance of slaves from the peasant households in the following period was not balanced by a corresponding increase in the number of living-in servants (with families). Instead, the simple family household consisting of spouses and children (the conjugal family) became the prevailing household type for the rest of the Middle Ages.

Continuous population growth in the early and high Middle Ages caused the rise of a large proletarian class of smallholders and cottagers who were dependent for their livelihood on wage-labour. They settled on the outskirts of the old peasant communities.

27 W. I. Miller, 'Some aspects of householding in the Medieval Icelandic commonwealth', *Continuity and Change*, 3 (1988), pp. 325, 333 and passim; Sigurðsson, 'Forholdet mellom frender', pp. 322–3. The joint family's structural socio-economic connections with well-to-do peasants and animal husbandry is discussed by M. Tornberg, 'Storfamiljinstitutionen i Finland', *Nord-Nytt* (1972), pp. 4–17, and O. Löfgren, 'Family and household among Scandinavian peasants', *Ethnologia Scandinavica* (1974), pp. 17–52. See also Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*, pp. 99–106.

28 Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*, pp. 87–94; Tornberg, 'Storfamiljinstitutionen', pp. 4–17; Löfgren, 'Family and household', pp. 17–52; K. Jern, 'Förvaltning, beskattning och befolkningsutveckling i svenska Österbotten före 1809', in *Svenska Österbottens historia*, 1 (Vasa, 1977), pp. 186, 189–92; E. Orrman, 'Ett samhälle av bönder och synderfolk', in *Emsalöboken*, 1 (Borgå, 1992), pp. 37–9; B. Moring, *Skärgårdsbor: Hushåll, familj och demografi i en finländsk kustbygd på 1600-, 1700- och 1800-talen* (Helsinki, 1994), pp. 50–5. I am indebted to Professor E. Orrman for some of the references.

29 J. Sandnes, 'Bondesamfunnet', in I. Semmingsen et al. (eds.), *Norges kulturhistorie*, 1 (Oslo, 1979), pp. 49–50; Sandnes, 'Tolv kyr, to hester og tre træler: Litt om omfanget av træleholdet i Norge i vikingtid og tidlig kristen tid', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 62 (Oslo, 1983), pp. 79–82; T. Iversen, *Trelldommen. Norsk slaveri i middelalderen* (Bergen, 1997); Benedictow, 'The demography', p. 154; Benedictow, Review of T. Iversen's monograph in *Historisk Tidsskrift*; Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*, pp. 125–6.

Population size

In 1938 Professor A. E. Christensen used the *Halland Register* in the so-called *King Valdemar's Land Register* (*Kong Valdemars Jordebog*) as the basis for an estimate of Denmark's thirteenth-century population that was accepted by many historians.³⁰ However, in 1977 Christensen himself denied the value of the estimate and the usefulness of the *Halland Register* for the purpose of estimating the Danish population.³¹ Nevertheless, in the second half of the thirteenth century Denmark's population was clearly much larger than that of any other Nordic country.

Only Icelandic historians have at their disposal literary evidence which may possibly be used to produce valid estimates of Iceland's medieval population. However, the sources are difficult to interpret and so far estimates vary greatly. It now seems to be more generally acknowledged that Iceland's population can hardly have been larger at the time of its medieval maximum than in 1703, when the first modern census registered 50,358 inhabitants distributed among 5,915 peasant holdings and 1,181 sub-tenancies.³² In the most recent Icelandic study Jón Viðar Sigurðsson concludes that in the thirteenth century there were 5,000–6,000 peasant holdings and no sub-tenancies in Iceland.

As there are no medieval sources containing statistically useful information on the size of medieval Icelandic households, Sigurðsson turns to the census of 1703. By studying a sample of eight local communities (*hreppar*)³³ in three different administrative districts (*sýslur*) he finds that the average number of persons living on each of the 366 peasant holdings of these *hreppar* was 6.5 persons. It is, however, uncertain whether this figure can be taken as representative of the medieval Icelandic household. If that were the case, Iceland may have had 32,500–39,000 inhabitants in the thirteenth century.³⁴

30 A. E. Christensen, 'Danmarks befolkning og bebyggelse i middelalderen', in A. Schück (ed.), *Befolkning under medeltiden* (Nordisk Kultur, 2, Stockholm, Oslo og København, 1938), pp. 32–48.

31 Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', p. 299; cf. E. Porsmose, 'Middelalder o. 1000–1536', in *Det danske landbrugs historie*, 1 (Odense, 1988), pp. 234–7; Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*, pp. 181–2.

32 B. Teittsson and M. Stefánsson, 'Um rannsóknir á íslenskri byggðarsögu tímabilsins fyrir 1700', *Saga*, 10 (1972), pp. 134–78; cf. Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic System*, pp. 183–4.

33 A *hreppr* was a local administrative unit which provided social assistance to poor and disabled persons.

34 J. V. Sigurðsson, 'Fra godord til riker: Gode- og godordsinstitusjonenes utvikling på Island på 1100- og 1200-tallet' (Graduate thesis, University of Bergen, 1987), pp. 170–5; cf. J. V. Sigurðsson, *Frá goðorðum til ríkja: Þróun goðavalds á 12. og 13. öld* (Reykjavík, 1989), pp. 126–9.

The Nordic population which can best be estimated is that of Norway thanks to an agrarian settlement pattern of separate farms whose names have largely been preserved. At the end of the Viking Age there may have been 27,500 peasant holdings ± 10 per cent (25,000–30,000) within the present-day borders,³⁵ and probably a further 3,900 (3,500–4,300) within the medieval borders (comprising the later Swedish provinces of Jämtland, Härjedalen and Bohuslän). Mean household size including slaves has already been roughly estimated at 5.5–6 persons. The addition for persons living outside the farming economy at this stage of social development is minimal, probably not more than 1–1.5 per cent. Thus, the population of medieval Norway at the end of the Viking Age can be estimated at around 185,000 persons. The margins of uncertainty are wide, 160,000 and 210,000 respectively, but one should keep in mind that they represent the multiplicative effects of extreme assumptions.

Around 1330 the number of peasant holdings in Norway can be more safely estimated than at the end of the Viking age, at 64,000 ± 10 per cent within the present borders, and at 73,000 ± 10 per cent within the medieval borders of mainland Norway. At this time population growth had probably almost stopped, which suggests a mean household size of 4.5 persons, as mentioned above. Most of the uncertainty regarding the frequency of joint and multiple families, lodgers and living-in servants is probably taken into account if the estimate is widened to 4.25–4.75 persons.³⁶ Thus, the central estimate of the farming population within the medieval borders of mainland Norway is 328,500 persons (279,000–381,000). If 5 per cent is added for the non-farming population, the central estimate increases to 345,000, with margins of uncertainty from 293,000 to 400,000 persons. In reality, these margins are not exhaustive, but their extension requires quite extreme assumptions. Thus, the population estimate can be reasonably expressed as 345,000 ± 15 per cent.

Other historians have argued for higher numbers of inhabitants within the present-day Norwegian borders towards the end of the high Middle Ages: about 400,000 and even more.³⁷ However, these estimates are based on a household multiplier, or rather on an average number of inhabitants per holding,

35 J. Sandnes, 'Gårds- og andre bustadnavn', in Sandnes and O. Stemshaug (eds.), *Norsk Stadnamnleksikon* (Oslo, 1976), p. 31.

36 The lower figure implies that there were almost no such persons at all (which is an extreme and even incredible assumption), the higher figure that there were, on average, 0.5 additional persons of these social categories per household, which must be considered quite a high estimate under the social circumstances outlined above.

37 See particularly J. Sandnes and H. Salvesen, *Ødegårdstid i Norge: Det nordiske ødegårdsprosjekts norske undersøkelser* (Det nordiske ødegårdsprosjekt: Publikasjoner, 4, Oslo, 1978), p. 61; K. Lunden, 'Gardar, bruk og menneske i høgmellomalderen', *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Oslo, 1979), pp. 137–8.

calculated on the basis of censuses of males produced in the 1660s. At that time society had changed comprehensively and profoundly from what it was in the Middle Ages, not least by the emergence of a new social class of cottagers (Norw. *husmenn*, sing. *husmann*) living on sub-tenancies within the territories of established farmsteads. This was a development which increased the average number of inhabitants per farmstead substantially, to 6 persons, a number for which there is no medieval evidence, whereas the multiplier of 4.5 persons established above is based on medieval demographic data.

Compared to the central estimate of the population at the end of the Viking Age, our evaluation of the medieval population maximum in about 1330 implies a growth of 75 per cent, and a mean annual growth rate through the period of about 0.2 per cent (i.e. a doubling of the population in 350 years). This is significantly less than the increase in the number of holdings because the end of slavery meant that unfree families and servants moved out and entered the social categories of small tenants, cottagers and day labourers. The incidence of multiple families would thus have been sharply reduced and the mean household size would have decreased correspondingly.

Toponymic and archaeological studies show that the populations of the Nordic countries must have grown quite rapidly in the Viking Age, and that growth continued until the last decades of the thirteenth century when it probably ended in most regions. Little more can be said with confidence about Denmark and Sweden.³⁸ However, it seems reasonable to suggest that the populations of Denmark and Sweden, like that of Norway, increased by roughly 75 per cent in each of these two periods, and that they were about three times larger in 1300 than in 750. This increase corresponds to a mean annual growth rate of around 0.2 per cent. Because of the exponential nature of the estimate, this means of course that growth, measured in absolute numbers of holdings or persons, was much faster in the Middle Ages than in the Viking Age.

In order to put these estimates in perspective one should note that, while in the 550 years between 750 and 1300 the Nordic populations may have trebled, the world population only doubled between AD 1 and 1550 (from about 250 millions to about 500 millions), which corresponds to an annual growth rate of c. 0.06 per cent.³⁹

38 Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Oldtid og vikingetid', pp. 78–87; Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', pp. 318–20; Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 234–7; A. Schück, 'Ur Sveriges medeltida befolkningshistoria', in Schück (ed.) *Befolkning under medeltiden*, pp. 160–4.

39 M. Livi-Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p. 31.

Rural conditions

ELJAS ORRMAN

Development of settlement

Sedentary settlement in Scandinavia was predominantly agrarian during the Iron Age and the Middle Ages. Grain cultivation and animal husbandry were the basic means of providing sustenance, but were complemented, according to local conditions, by various forms of hunting, fishing and gathering.

We have seen (Chapter 1) that large parts of Scandinavia are marginal for agriculture. In high-lying areas and in the far north climate does not permit grain growing. Areas of high elevation also lack the necessary conditions for pastoralism, which can, on the other hand, be successfully practised in Iceland and also in favourable locations in Greenland.

Nevertheless, the Nordic climate is considerably more favourable than at the same latitudes in many other parts of the globe. This is mainly due to the effects of the Gulf Stream. The positive difference between mean annual temperature in various parts of Sweden and global mean temperature at the same latitudes is between 5 and 7°C.

The distribution of sedentary settlement at the beginning of the Middle Ages, i.e. around AD 1000, can be established in various ways. The archaeological record, mainly cemeteries and dwelling sites, points to the extent and locations of such settlement. With the exception of Finland, types of place-names can be used to determine the age of settlements; for example, certain types of suffixes in place-names belong largely to the Viking Age and earlier periods, others to the Middle Ages and later periods. However, there are also types of names that were widely used during both the Viking and Middle Ages. Therefore, place-names cannot always show whether the settlement units date from prehistoric times or from the Middle Ages. It should also be noted that agrarian settlement, as evidenced by archaeology, normally predates the oldest farm names in fertile agricultural regions and often elsewhere as well.

In Norway, place-names ending in *-vin*, *-heim*, *-stad*, *-land* and *-set* are from the Viking Age and earlier times. Medieval Norwegian place-names include those ending in *-rud*/*-rød* and those with *kot*, *reit*, *halt* and *bøle* as either prefix or suffix, as well as names with the suffixes *-brenna* and *-sved*.¹ In Sweden and Denmark, the various types of place-names follow largely the same chronology. In these countries settlements with the following place-name suffixes, among others, are from prehistoric times: *-ing*/*-inge*, *-løse/lösa*, *-um*/*-hem*, *-lev*/*-löv* and *-sted*/*-stad*. The same applies to a number of *-by* and *-torp* names, and in Sweden to the names *-tuna* and *-vin*. In Denmark certain types of *torp* names (modern forms: *-rup* *-strop* and *-drup*) are from the first centuries of the Middle Ages, while names with the suffixes *-rud*, *-holt* and *-køp* are exclusively medieval. In Sweden numerous names ending in *-by* and *-torp* still appeared during the Middle Ages, while the suffixes *-böle*, *-bo*, *-boda*, *-måla* and *-rud*/*-ryd* are solely medieval.²

Existing knowledge of the extent of settlement, the forms in which it was organised and the means of sustenance in the Nordic countries in the Viking and Middle Ages has markedly increased during the past two decades. This has led to changes in the overall understanding of the history of settlement that are in many respects radical. The new concepts and views are largely the result of collaboration between various disciplines, including history, archaeology, human geography and place-name studies. In addition, the intensive utilisation of both older and newer scientific methods for investigating human activity in the past and dating the remains of it have been of considerable importance. These methods include palynology, soil-phosphate analyses, radiocarbon dating, dendrochronology and thermoluminescence dating. But despite these advances there are still many unsolved problems in the history of settlement in the Nordic region, and agreement has yet to be reached on several fundamental issues.

- 1 A. Holmsen, *Norges historie fra de eldste tider til 1660* (Oslo, 1977, 4th ed.), pp. 213–15; J. Sandnes, *Ødetid og gjenreisning: Trøndsk busetningshistorie ca. 1200–1600* (Oslo, 1971), pp. 22, 38; J. Sandnes, 'Gards- og andre bustadnavn', in J. Sandnes and O. Stemshaug (eds.), *Norsk stadnamnleksikon* (Oslo, 1976), pp. 29–32; J. Sandnes, 'Bosetning og næringsliv i Nordvestskandinavia i yngre jernalder og tidlig kristen middelalder: en oversikt', in E. Baudou and K.-H. Dahlstedt (eds.), *Nord-Skandinaviens historia i tvärvetenskaplig belysning* (*Acta Universitatis Umensis, Umeå Studies in Humanities*, 24, Umeå, 1980), p. 72; M. Oftedal, 'Busetnad', *KLNM*, 2 (1957), cols. 370–3.
- 2 S. Helmfrid, *Östergötland "Västanstång": Studien über die ältere Agrarlandschaft und ihre Genese* (*Geografiska Annaler*, 1962), pp. 54–68; E. Porsmose, 'Middelalder o. 1000–1536', in C. Bjørn (ed.), *Det danske landbrugs historie*, 1 (Odense, 1988), pp. 237–48; K. Hald, 'Busetnad, Danmark og Sverige', *KLNM*, 2 (1957), cols. 375–6; J. Myrdal, *Jordbruken under feodalismen 1000–1700* (J. Myrdal (ed.), *Det svenska jordbrukets historia*, 2, Borås, 1999), pp. 27–8.

Expansion of settlement and growth of population

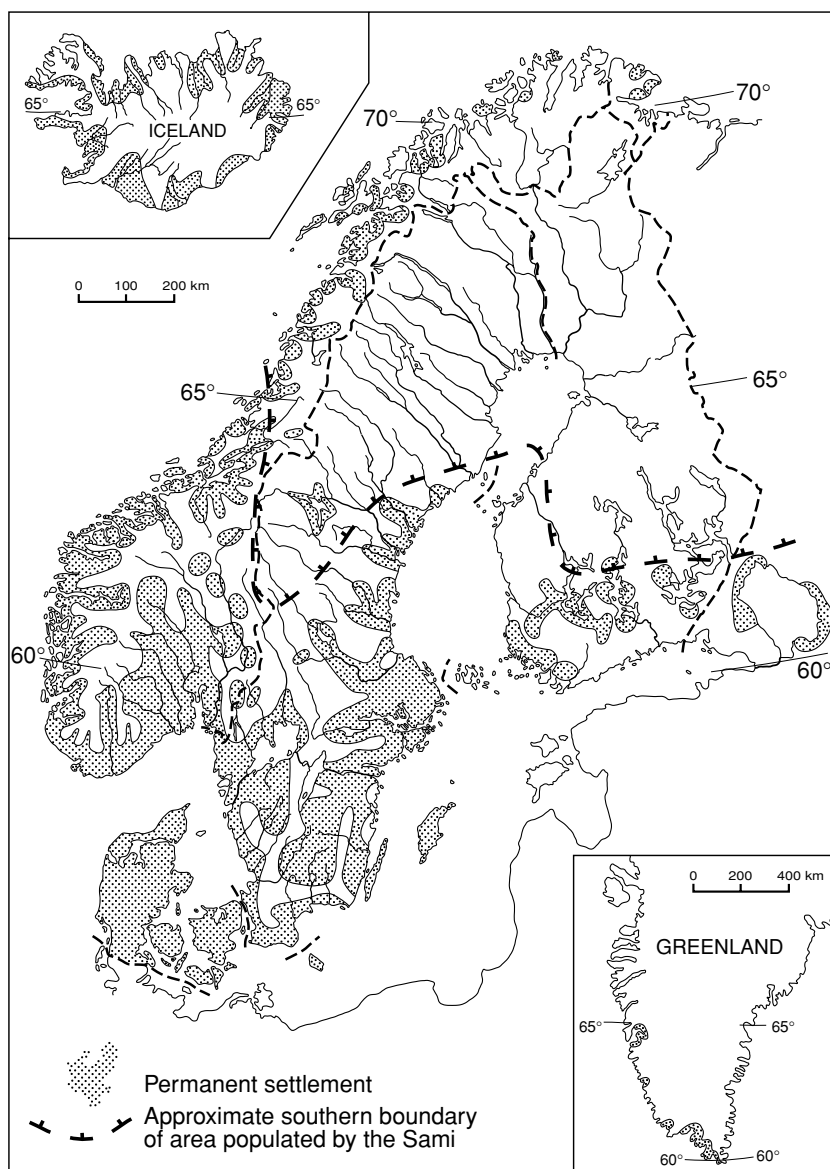
In the early eleventh century sedentary settlement in Scandinavia extended furthest north along the coast of Norway. Here, agrarian settlement definitely existed as far north as 70°N in the region of present-day Tromsø.³ In the eastern and inland parts of the Scandinavian peninsula such settlement extended only to 63°N, and further east in the Finnish regions only as far as 62°N. In the west, in Greenland, Scandinavian settlement reached 65°N (Map 11).

North of 58°N the soils best suited to agriculture using medieval implements consisted generally of glacial and post-glacial clays (so-called Ancylys and Littorina clays). These soils are mostly found in the coastal and lacustrine regions of Sweden and Finland, i.e. in areas which during and after the Ice Age were inundated (see Chapter 1). Similar clayey soils are also found in south-eastern Norway and south and east of Trondheimsfjord. Heavy clays were, however, less suited to agriculture in the Middle Ages because of the difficulties of working them. South of 58°N on the Scandinavian peninsula only small areas along the coasts were under water during and after the last Ice Age. There, the most fertile soils are moraine clays that were not leached.

In central and western Europe the development of settlement from the beginning of the eleventh to the middle of the fourteenth centuries was determined by vigorous population growth, which everywhere led to the cultivation of less fertile marginal soils. In Scandinavia there was in the Viking and early and high Middle Ages a considerable growth of settlement which has also generally been regarded as the result of an increase of population. New Viking Age settlement units were established within previously settled areas and regions, thereby increasing the density of settlement; in addition, previously unoccupied areas within such regions were now taken under cultivation. In some regions there was a process of relocation which was not caused solely by population growth. At the same time, extensive migration began from the Scandinavian countries: westwards and south-westwards from Norway and Denmark, and eastwards from Sweden. During the Viking Age the settlement structure also changed in many areas.

Nordic settlement growth continued until the first half of the fourteenth century, when the expansive phase ended as a result of the loss of population caused by the Black Death. However, the medieval development of settlement differed in some aspects from that of the Viking Age. The first centuries in medieval times were a dynamic stage in the development of the Scandinavian agrarian societies. Alongside quantitative growth there were major changes

³ Sandnes, 'Bosetning', p. 71.



Map 11 Scandinavian settlement in the eleventh century

in the structure of settlement and the institutional forms of exploiting natural resources in many areas.

Developments in the Danish realm

At the beginning of the Middle Ages the most densely populated parts of the Nordic countries were the southern regions under Danish rule. Broadly speaking, most of the Danish realm was already settled at that time, even if there were still considerable wooded areas in peripheral parts, for example in the provinces of Skåne, Blekinge and Halland in present-day Sweden, where the zones bordering on the provinces of Småland and Västergötland consisted of unoccupied forest areas far into the Middle Ages. The main areas of settlement in the Danish realm were then the eastern parts of Jylland, the western Limfjord area, the Danish islands, and Skåne. The soils in these areas are fertile, mostly loamy moraine clays or clayey moraines. The central and western areas of Jylland, west and south-west of the Jylland ice margin, are characterised by diluvial sandy soil and fluvial plains.⁴

Expansion of settlement continued in the Danish realm at least until the second half of the thirteenth century. It has been maintained that population growth ended at that time, long before the sharp mid-fourteenth decline caused by the Black Death, but this opinion has been questioned (see Chapter 18). During most of the high Middle Ages new settlements were established throughout the realm. Some of them, many with names ending in *-torp*, were established in the periphery of cultivated land, in areas jointly exploited by the farms of existing villages. This did not always imply growth in the number of settlements but rather a relocation of existing settlements connected with agricultural innovations. As a result of these relocations there often emerged a settlement pattern with farmsteads 1,600 to 2,000 m apart. This was due to the fact that it cost too much labour to carry out various tasks, notably the manuring of fields, more than 800–1000 m from the farmhouses. An optimal settlement structure would then consist of dwelling sites in the middle of fields with a radius of no more than 1,000 m.⁵

4 L. Hedeager and K. Kristiansen, 'Oldtid o. 4000 f.Kr.–1000 e.Kr.', in Bjørn (ed.), *Det danske landbrugs historie*, 1, pp. 8–9; *Historisk Atlas Danmark*, map 19a; K.-E. Frandsen, *Vang og tægt: Studier over dyrkningssystemer og agrarstrukturer i Danmarks landsbyer 1682–83* (Esbjerg, 1983), pp. 250–5.

5 Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 239–40; V. Hansen, 'Geografiske variabler', in S. Gissel (ed.), *Hornsherredundersøgelsen, med indledende metodeafsnit (Det nordiske Ødegårdsprojekt, 2, København, 1977)*, p. 33; E. Ulsig, 'Pest og befolkningsnedgang i Danmark i det 14. århundre', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 91 (København, 1991), pp. 23–5; N. Hybel, 'Teorier om de vesteuropæiske godssystemers afvikling i senmiddelalderen', in P. Ingelman and J. V. Jensen (eds.), *Danmark i senmiddelalderen* (Aarhus, 1994), pp. 47–68.

During the first medieval centuries settlement spread to the remaining forest regions of Denmark; there was consequently competition over the forest resources in the later Middle Ages. Population and settlement growth also resulted in a shortage of cultivated land and the emergence of numerous small holdings which operated at close to subsistence level. In contrast to the Viking Age the early and high medieval Danish population growth did not lead to emigration. This does not mean that opportunities were lacking; in the twelfth century large areas along the southern coasts of the Baltic were annexed by the Danes.⁶ Nevertheless, there was an influx of foreign colonists into the south of Denmark rather than a movement in the opposite direction. From the eleventh century, at the latest, peasants from Friesland settled in the south-western coastal range and the adjacent islands, and Saxons later established themselves north of the Schlei–Danevirke–Treene boundary line.⁷ In this respect, Denmark differed from the German regions to the south where colonisation eastwards reached immense proportions in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The coastal regions of the southern Danish islands, notably Falster, were an exception to the general expansion of settlement. Here, the coastal villages were deserted in the first half of the twelfth century due to the raids of the Slavonic Wends; settlement withdrew inland and a new forest zone emerged along the coasts. There was modest Wendish colonisation in the smaller islands, particularly Lolland, but Danish re-occupation of the coastal areas began when the Wends had been subdued in the second half of the twelfth century.⁸

Sweden and Finland

The parts of the Scandinavian peninsula that were to form the medieval Swedish kingdom – that is, present-day Sweden with the exception of Skåne, Blekinge, Halland and Bohuslän in the south and Härjedalen and Jämtland further north – can be described as largely low-lying with highly variable soils. Glacial and post-glacial soils occur around the major lacustrine system of central Sweden, the Mälars basin, and in the south-west around Lake Vänern and along the coasts. In the so-called South Swedish Highlands, comprising parts of Småland, Östergötland and Västergötland, soils consist of moraines at elevations higher than the highest post-glacial shoreline. With the exception of

6 Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 235–7, 242–3.

7 A. E. Christensen, 'Danmarks befolkning og bebyggelse i middelalderen', in A. Schück (ed.), *Befolkning under medeltiden* (Nordisk kultur, 2, Oslo 1938), pp. 22–6.

8 S. Gissel, 'Opsummering og konklusion', in S. Gissel (ed.), *Falsterundersøgelsen*, 1 (Det nordiske Ødegårdsprojekt, 16, Odense, 1989), pp. 355–6.

the coastal regions the same is true of the areas north of the low-lying regions around lakes Mälaren, Hjälmaren and Vänern.

In Sweden, too, the Viking Age was a dynamic phase in the development of settlement, and expansion continued in the early and high Middle Ages until the mid-fourteenth century. At first the main tendency was that settlement in previously settled regions became denser as new settlements were established in outfields, and this type of colonisation continued throughout the Middle Ages. In some regions Viking Age settlement also started to spread to neighbouring areas where it had previously only been sparse or lacking altogether.⁹

In the Mälär region – Uppland, Södermanland and Västmanland – and in Östergötland to the south-east, glacial and post-glacial clayey soils predominate in the plains and valleys of the so-called fissure-valley landscape (Chapter 1). Much of this extensive region was already under cultivation in prehistoric times. The geographical distribution of Iron Age cemeteries and their frequency show that settlement on the lands of old settlement units became denser in the late Iron Age. At the same time it gravitated from the lighter sandy soils on higher elevations to the lower Mälär basin and into the archipelago to the east, where land uplift of 0.2–0.7 m per century increased the land available. Already before AD 1000 settlement in the central regions had reached its maximum extent for several centuries to come. The following period saw the continued advance of colonisation into outlying forest regions, a movement that had started towards the end of the Iron Age. Sedentary settlement expanded northwards in the forest regions of Uppland and Västmanland and in Gästrikland, areas that had earlier been exploited by hunting and iron production. Thus a continuous settled area extending as far as Dalarna emerged during the first centuries of the Middle Ages.¹⁰

The high medieval expansion of settlement included the previously unsettled or sparsely settled forest region of the South Swedish Highlands.¹¹ Earlier

9 K.-G. Selinge, 'Graves and Iron Age settlement', in K.-G. Selinge (ed.), *Cultural Heritage and Preservation (National Atlas of Sweden, Italy, 1994)*, pp. 31–5; K.-G. Selinge, 'Reviderad karta – reviderad forntid', *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift*, 11 (1986), p. 97; U. Sporrang, *Mälärbygd: Agrar bebyggelse och odling ur ett historisk-geografiskt perspektiv* (Kulturgeografiska Institutionen, Stockholms universitet, Meddelanden, 61, Stockholm, 1985), pp. 191–9; S.-O. Lindquist, *Det förhistoriska kulturlandskapet i östra Östergötland: Hallebyundersökningen*, 1 (Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Studies in North-European Archaeology, 2, Stockholm, 1968), p. 155; Myrdal, *Jordbruket*, pp. 25–9.

10 Selinge, 'Graves and Iron Age settlement', p. 35; U. Sporrang, *Kolonisation, bebyggelseutveckling och administration: Studier i agrar kulturlandskapsutveckling under vikingatid och tidig medeltid med exempel från Uppland och Närke* (Kulturgeografiska Institutionen, Meddelanden, 61, Stockholm, 1985), pp. 32–4, 39, 132, 197–8; Sporrang, *Mälärbygd*, pp. 33–7.

11 C. Tollin, 'Tidigmedeltida kolonisation i mellersta Småland', *Ymer*, 106 (1986), pp. 64–5.

studies dated the settlement there to the late Middle Ages, but recent research has demonstrated that it definitely belongs to the period before the Black Death.¹²

From the thirteenth century there is written evidence for the expansion of settlement in the southern parts of Sweden. Unsettled areas were held by the inhabitants in joint ownership, which meant that no one could freely establish new farmsteads or settlements. The Crown actively supported colonisation and from the twelfth century, at the latest, laid claim to one-third of common land in these parts of the country. Such land was distributed to be brought under cultivation by the nobility and the Cistercian order, which in the twelfth century established the monasteries of Alvastra, Nydala and Varnhem. Local dignitaries in Götaland participated actively in the colonisation movement by establishing new farmsteads within their shares of common land and on land donated by the Crown.¹³

In the Swedish parts of the Scandinavian peninsula settlement also spread to previously unoccupied areas during the first medieval centuries. This is particularly evident around the Gulf of Bothnia. Here, prehistoric agrarian settlement had been limited to a narrow coastal zone and the lower parts of the river valleys, areas that were mostly less than 80–100 m above sea level, under the highest elevation of the post-glacial Littorina Sea (Chapter 1) where clayey soils are common. The only significant exception further inland was the area around Lake Storsjön in Jämtland where the clayey moraine soils, rich in lime, were particularly well suited to farming. The climate in these parts was also more favourable than in surrounding areas. In the high Middle Ages sedentary settlement advanced inland from the low-lying coastal regions to altitudes above the highest post-glacial shoreline, 200–280 m above sea level. But it was not until the end of the high Middle Ages that Swedish agrarian settlement began to expand northwards to areas where only Sami hunters and gatherers had previously lived.

In the coastal areas and river valleys north and north-west of the Gulf of Bothnia – in Västerbotten, Norrbotten and northern Österbotten in present-day Sweden and Finland – agrarian settlers from the Finnish regions of Satakunta and Häme (Tavastland) in the south-east appear to have established themselves in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries at the latest. The

12 K. Bååth, *Öde sedan stora döden var: Bebyggelse och befolkning i norra Vedbo under senmedeltid och 1500-tal* (*Bibliotheca Historica Lundensis*, 51, Lund, 1983), pp. 14–16.

13 C. G. Andræ, 'Kolonisation, Sverige', *KLNM*, 8 (1963), col. 634; Tollin, 'Tidigmedeltida kolonisation', pp. 64–76; L. Klang, 'Kolonisation och bebyggelseutveckling i nordöstra Smålands inland', *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift*, 11 (1986), pp. 159–61.

valley of the river Tornio (Torne) became the centre of this new settlement. In Västerbotten, west of the Gulf of Bothnia, it advanced southwards as far as 65°N. From the regions of Hälsingland and Ångermanland, settled by Swedes, colonisation towards the north apparently began as late as the first half of the fourteenth century, but an earlier date has also been claimed. Swedish colonisation proceeded northwards to areas where Finnish settlers were already established. There is documentary evidence that in the 1320s and 1330s Swedish prelates and noblemen were engaged in colonisation efforts supported by the Crown in the northern regions. To some extent these efforts appear to have been stimulated by considerations of foreign policy following the treaty of 1323 between Sweden and Novgorod.¹⁴

In the parts of Finland that came under Swedish rule in the Middle Ages agrarian settlement at the end of the Viking Age was restricted to a few regions. Such settlement was to be found partly in the south-west, in a coastal zone roughly 150 km long and stretching some 20 km inland along the river valleys. The adjoining archipelago was mostly unoccupied but served as outfields for hunting and fishing. A further area of sedentary settlement was located around the large inland lakes of southern Häme, extending westwards into the province of Satakunta. Here small hamlets were situated on the shores of the larger lakes and along the rivers, often with extensive forest areas in between. The population of both the western coastal zone and the inland region belonged to the West-Finnish ethnic group, speaking Baltic-Finnic dialects, and formed its own cultural sphere. In the east, along the northern and western shores of Lake Ladoga, which came under the authority of Novgorod, a new concentration of settlement emerged from the ninth century, established by the Karelians who were Finns. In its early stages Karelian culture was marked by distinctly West-Finnish influences. The northern shores of the Gulf of Finland and the east coast of the Gulf of Bothnia obviously had no sedentary settlement at the beginning of the eleventh century.

In the course of the Viking Age, settlement had become generally denser both in the south-western coastal region and in the inland regions, where there was also some expansion towards the north and east. This is attested

¹⁴ H. Sundström et al., 'The earliest settlement in the Tornio (Torne) River valley: An example of inter-disciplinary research', in S. Gissel et al. (eds.), *Desertion and Land Colonization in the Nordic Countries c. 1300–1600 (The Scandinavian Research Project on Deserted Farms and Villages)*, 11, Uppsala, 1981, pp. 256–70; J. Vahtola, 'Kansojen moninaisuus', in O. Hederyd and Y. Alamäki (eds.), *Tornionlaakson historia*, 1 (Malung, 1991), p. 210; S. E. Olofsson, 'Övre Norrlands medeltid', in G. Westin (ed.), *Tiden till 1600 (Övre Norrlands historia)*, 1, Umeå, 1962, pp. 140–55; T. Wallerström, *Norrbotnen, Sverige och medeltiden: Problem kring makt och bosättning i en europeisk periferi*, 1 (Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology, 15:1, Stockholm, 1995), pp. 84–6, 99–105.

by an increased number of burial grounds. At the same time a contraction of settlement occurred in certain coastal areas. Along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Bothnia the earlier Iron Age settlement disappeared in the first half of the ninth century.

In the Middle Ages Finland entered a stage of settlement expansion in common with the rest of Scandinavia. There was, however, a difference in that the positive trend continued in Finland after the mid-fourteenth century when settlement contracted in most other regions of Scandinavia (see Chapter 18).

In southern Finland medieval settlement spread to previously unoccupied areas away from the coast and the centres inland; it was, however, generally quite sparse. In the inland regions of Satakunta and Häme it expanded in all directions from the central lakes, thus progressing towards the south and south-east, in the direction of the Gulf of Finland. In this way, extensive regions were sparsely colonised in the fourteenth century. The large forest areas separating settlements were the common property of the sedentary population, used as hunting and fishing grounds (*erämark*). The Crown, i.e. the central Swedish authorities and their local representatives, supported colonisation efforts in the fourteenth century and later by offering the right, under certain conditions, to cultivate the *erämark* regions.

Characteristically, medieval settlement in southern Finland spread to areas with soils which were less suited to contemporary tillage techniques. Throughout the Iron Age settlement along the south-west coast had been concentrated in the areas of Littorina clays which could be worked with relative ease. Also, in the inland regions the Iron Age settlers kept to light sandy and silty clay soils. Medieval colonisation, on the other hand, took place in areas where the top soils of plains and river valleys consisted mostly of heavy clays with moraines dominating at higher elevations.

West of the long Lake Päijänne in the Satakunta–Häme region medieval settlement did not advance more than some 20 km, at the most, towards the north, only in a few places crossing the ice marginal formation of central Finland which runs mostly SW–NE in a wide arc through the central parts of the country. North of this formation soils are considerably poorer than to the south.

At the beginning of the Middle Ages parts of the coastal area and the river valleys east of the Gulf of Bothnia, in the Finnish province of Österbotten, were colonised by Finns from the more southerly regions of Satakunta and Häme. In the valleys of the Kemijoki and Tornio rivers Finnish settlers advanced as far as the Arctic Circle in the Middle Ages. Settlement also expanded westwards and southwards into present-day Sweden. In Västerbotten, on the western

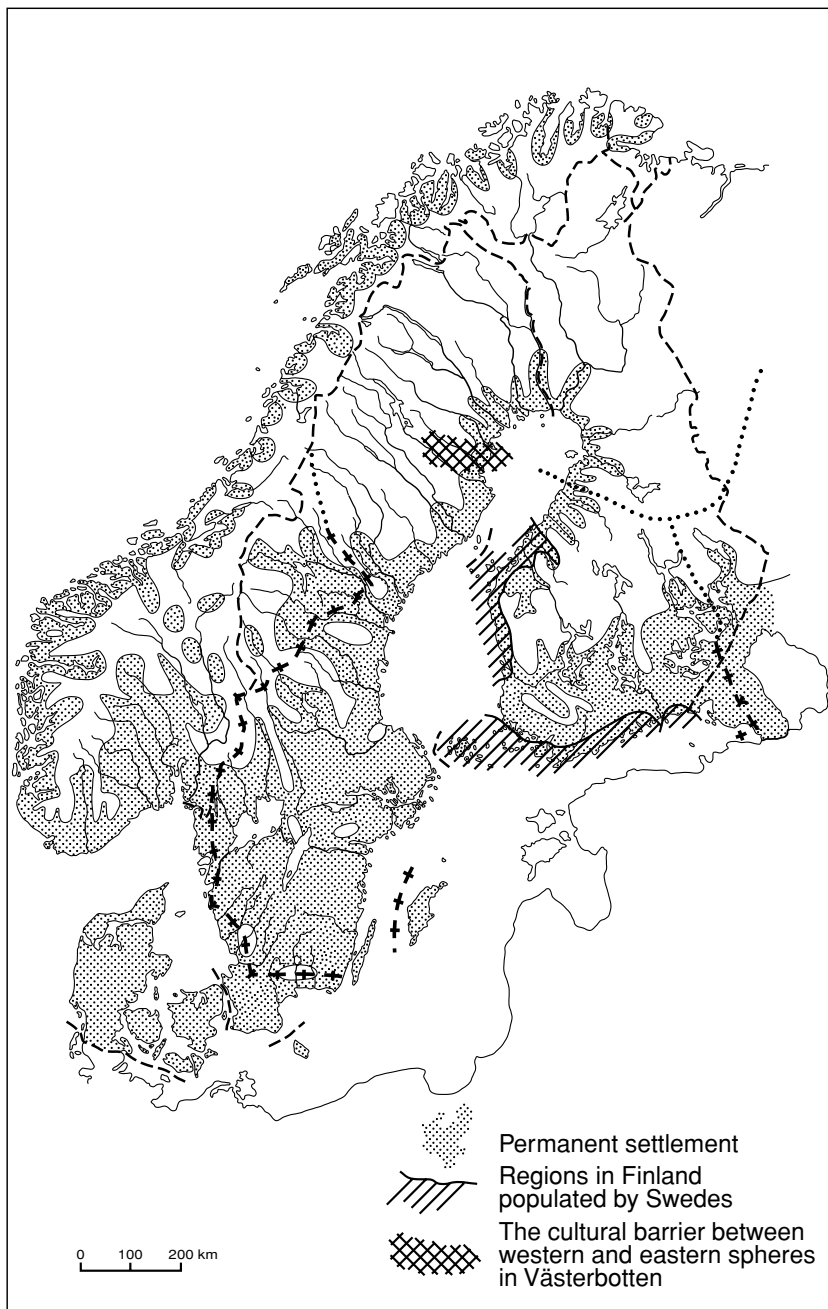
coast of the Gulf of Bothnia, Finnish settlement was even centuries later delimited by a cultural boundary at roughly 65°N in the vicinity of present-day Skellefteå. This 'cultural barrier' separated the eastern and western cultural spheres.¹⁵

The area of Karelian settlement west and north of Lake Ladoga underwent a flourishing period from the twelfth century, as attested by a number of features, including a marked settlement expansion. From their core area around Lake Ladoga the Karelians spread to the neighbouring areas to the west and north, advancing as far north-east as the White Sea. The sparsely occupied west Finnish settlement areas between lakes Ladoga and Päijänne came under strong Karelian influence from the twelfth century. Before the Treaty of Oreshek (Nöteborg) in 1323 between Sweden and Novgorod (see Chapter 12(d)) this intermediate region had become completely Karelian in character, with the exception of the eastern shores of Lake Päijänne.

In the high Middle Ages colonists from Sweden became a new population element in Finland. Their immigration was linked to the eastward expansion of Swedish power that brought the western and southern parts of present-day Finland under Swedish rule. More extensive eastward emigration from various parts of Sweden appears to have begun before the middle of the twelfth century; until the beginning of the thirteenth century it affected Åland, the south-western archipelago and the western parts of the province of Uusimaa (Nyland). The development of settlement in Åland is enigmatic. Settled from Sweden already in the Migration Period the archipelago appears to have been almost totally abandoned before AD 1000 and resettled in connection with the Swedish eastward expansion in the high Middle Ages. The theory of discontinuity has, however, been questioned and the lack of archaeological finds has been attributed to Christian influences.

A second wave of Swedish colonists followed the so-called second crusade to Finland, promoted by the Swedish Crown for political reasons at the end of the 1230s. The regions north of the Gulf of Finland as far as the Bay of Viipuri (Viborg), which until then had been practically uninhabited, and the eastern coast of the Gulf of Bothnia became the territories of a homogeneous Swedish agrarian population (see Map 12). Eastward migration from Sweden, which extended not only to Finland but also to areas on the Estonian coast,

15 E. Orrman, 'Geographical factors in the spread of permanent settlement in parts of Finland and Sweden from the end of the Iron Age to the beginning of modern times', *Fennoscandia archaeologica*, 7 (1991), pp. 16–18; P. Fjällström, 'Den nordsvenska kulturbarriären – en symbol för det mångkulturella Norrland', *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift*, 14 (1987), fig. 1 on p. 44.



Map 12 Scandinavian settlement at the end of the Middle Ages

ceased around the mid-fourteenth century. Since then the regions of Finland originally colonised by Swedes have largely remained Swedish-speaking.¹⁶

Norway and the Norse island communities to the west

Owing to geographical factors, such as considerable differences in elevation and the limited amount of arable land, the development of medieval settlement in Norway is marked by features which set it apart from the other Nordic countries. Until the present day hardly more than 3 per cent of Norway's total land mass has been under cultivation. Early Viking Age settlement centred on regions with the best conditions for agriculture. Such areas are to be found in the southern and central parts of the country, especially in Østlandet and around Trondheimsfjord, the only areas with extensive deposits of fine-grained glacial and post-glacial sediments. The Iron Age population preferred light, easily drained sandy soils. In general, settlement concentrated on the shores of the fjords and the large inland lakes of Østlandet, although it also followed valleys further inland.¹⁷

Archaeological evidence and the frequency of place-names of various ages have traditionally been interpreted as showing that Norway underwent a marked expansion of settlement in the Viking and Middle Ages until the first half of the fourteenth century. Recent archaeological interpretations have stressed the possibility of strong settlement growth as early as the preceding Merovingian Period (see Chapter 3), and this has toned down not only the extent of the internal Viking Age colonisation that undoubtedly took place, but also the importance of population pressure as a motive for Norwegian expansion overseas. Several factors contribute to explain this expansion; yet it was hardly accidental that the bulk of Norwegian colonists settling in the Atlantic islands left from the coastal districts of western Norway where the available resources of new land were then limited. To land-hungry peasants in Vestlandet the alternative of settling in Iceland, Føroyar, Shetland and Orkney, not to speak of the British Isles further south, may more often than not have been preferable to exploiting more modest resources at home.

16 G. Kerkkonen, *Västnyländsk kustbebyggelse under medeltiden* (Helsingfors, 1945), pp. 269–77; E. Orrman, 'Den svenska bebyggelsens historia', in K. Zilliacus (ed.), *Finska skären: Studier i åboländsk kulturhistoria utgivna av Konstsamfundet till dess 50-årsjubileum 1990* (Lovisa, 1990), pp. 198–208, 221–35; Y. Kaukiainen, 'Suomen asuttaminen', in E. Jutikkala et al. (eds.), *Suomen taloushistoria*, 1 (Helsinki, 1980), pp. 25–30.

17 A. Sømme, *Jordbrukets geografi i Norge, A–B (Skrifter fra Norges Handelshøyskole i rekken geografiske avhandlinger*, 3, Bergen, 1949–59), A, p. 40, B, p. 9; Sandnes, *Ødetid og gjenreisning*, p. 16.

In the Viking and Middle Ages agrarian settlement spread across a greater part of Norway and at the same time became denser. Increasingly, there was a movement towards land that in one way or another was less suited to medieval tillage techniques. Heavier, clayey soils, more difficult to work than the light sandy areas, were coming under cultivation in the Viking Age and the first medieval centuries. Settlement also advanced in the valleys and up the hillsides to higher altitudes where the climate was, at best, marginal for grain cultivation and soils were, as a rule, less fertile than at lower elevations. The areas that came under cultivation were often, as in Sweden, commons that had previously been exploited jointly by the farmers of the local communities. However, from the second half of the twelfth century, at the latest, the Crown claimed ownership of holdings cleared on common land.

Norwegian historians have particularly stressed that medieval population growth made it necessary to put increasingly less fertile soils under cultivation. Holdings also generally became smaller, partly by subdivision of older farms, partly as a result of limited opportunities for clearing. The process of subdivision went especially far in Vestlandet, notably around the inner reaches of the fjords, where arable land was almost exhausted in the high Middle Ages. Even in the low-lying areas around Trondheimsfjord there were only limited possibilities for establishing new farmsteads or settlements. It became increasingly difficult for the peasant families who worked the many smallholdings that emerged under such conditions to make a living.¹⁸

Along the coast north of Trøndelag a sparse pattern of Norwegian settlement appears to have existed as far as Finnmark in the Viking Age. North of the limit of grain cultivation in southern Troms the scattered Norwegian settlers must have based their existence on fishing and the hunting of sea mammals in combination with some animal husbandry, as well as on exploiting the Sami or trading with them. During the early medieval centuries the coastal districts north of Trøndelag became the object of active agrarian colonisation in the same way as the coastal areas of the Gulf of Bothnia in the east, but in northern Norway exploitation of marine resources must have been even more significant in combination with farming. From the mid-thirteenth century the expanding fish trade caused an influx of Norwegian settlers into Troms and Finnmark. Military considerations, in response to the activity of Novgorod on the Kola Peninsula, led the Norwegian Crown to promote colonisation in the

¹⁸ Holmsen, *Norges historie*, pp. 215–16; K. Lunden, *Norge under Sverreætten* (K. Mykland, ed., *Norges historie*, 3, Oslo, 1976), pp. 234–62.

far north, and in the late Middle Ages permanent Norwegian settlement in fishing villages was established as far east as Vadsø.¹⁹

Medieval agrarian settlement in Norway appears to have reached its greatest extent and density in the first half of the fourteenth century, but growth may have started to ebb out before the positive trend was definitely broken by the plague at the end of the 1340s and a marked contraction of settlement ensued. Until then settlement in many parts of the mountain regions had spread to places that were precarious in view of grain cultivation and were never recultivated. In the southern parts of the country settlement advanced to 800 m above sea level; further north in Trøndelag to the 600-metre contour line.

We have seen that the dynamics of Norwegian societal development in the Viking Age brought about considerable westward migration, mainly to maritime regions. Norse settlements emerged in Føroyar, Iceland and Greenland, and emigrants from Norway also established themselves as farmers in the previously settled islands of Shetland and Orkney, in the Hebrides, and along the Scottish and west English coasts (see Chapter 8(d)).

Iceland and Greenland, the westernmost Norse settlements in the Atlantic, were agrarian communities of a different nature compared with their counterparts in Norway, not colonised until the Viking Age and clearly marginal, even though the climate in the late Viking Age and the first medieval centuries was more favourable than later. Grain could rarely be cultivated successfully in Iceland, and not at all in Greenland, where seeds did not ripen.

In Iceland settlement was restricted to the low-lying lands by the coast and the valleys extending into the inland regions. The main focus was on areas below 100 m above sea level, although there were a few farmsteads between 100 and 200 m. At exceptionally advantageous sites farmsteads were established at elevations of up to 400–550 m. In Greenland the colonists concentrated in two settlements. The Eastern Settlement (*Eystrbyggð*) was the larger of them, situated near the southern tip of Greenland; the smaller Western Settlement (*Vestribyggð*) was some 500–600 km to the north-west. The Eastern Settlement had farmsteads at sites up to 200 m above sea level.²⁰

19 Lunden, *Norge under Sverreætten*, pp. 262–3; Sandnes, 'Bosetning og næringsliv', pp. 74–6; K. Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt 1130–1315* (Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norges historie*, 3, Oslo, 1995), p. 85; H. Bjørkvik, *Folketap og sammenbrudd 1350–1520* (Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norges historie*, 4, Oslo, 1996), pp. 39–40.

20 C. Keller, 'Gård og seter på Grønland – et forsøk på å analysere ressurstilgangen i middelalderen ved hjelp av satelittbilder', in G. Ólafsson (ed.), *Hus, gård och bebyggelse: Föredrag från det XVI nordiska arkeologmötet, Island 1982* (Reykjavík, 1983), pp. 63–4.

Factors determining the character of settlement development

Since sedentary settlement in medieval Scandinavia was of a predominantly agrarian character, expansion into new areas was primarily dictated by opportunities to practise farming with the available technology. In the coastal districts, however, opportunities for fishing and the exploitation of other marine resources were also decisive in determining the location of settlements. When European markets were opened to Scandinavian fishery products in the course of the high Middle Ages, the spread of settlements in coastal regions was further determined by fishing, particularly in northern Norway. In certain parts of Sweden the increased European demand for iron contributed to the colonisation of previously uninhabited areas.

We have seen that a recurrent feature of the high medieval development of settlement in Scandinavia was its expansion, caused by population growth, into areas that were more or less marginal given contemporary agricultural technology. This was most evident in Denmark and Norway. On local and regional levels this process of expansion depended not only on geographical conditions but also on available agricultural techniques and the forms of co-operation within each agrarian community, factors that were not necessarily directly linked to the growing population pressure. The necessity of bringing less fertile areas into cultivation in turn influenced farming technology.

The influence of improved farming techniques on the spread and location of settlement is illustrated by developments in the central Danish regions. Here, the emergence of new settlements in previously cultivated areas, described above, was apparently largely dictated by efforts to establish an optimum distance between dwelling sites and all parts of the cultivated areas belonging to them. The introduction of two- and three-course rotation in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, or possibly somewhat earlier, increased the demand for labour connected with manuring. To reduce the input of labour some of the farms were moved out from old villages to more peripheral locations, in order to reduce the distances between the dwelling sites and the most distant fields.²¹ In this case, the introduction of a new and more complex system of grain cultivation caused changes in the settlement structure and led to the emergence of new settlement units. Similar changes in settlement structure also occurred in some parts of Sweden.

The cultivation of new areas with primitive agricultural implements was tangibly influenced by two partly conflicting objectives. On the one hand,

²¹ Hansen, 'Geografiske variabler', p. 33; Frandsen, *Vang og tægt*, p. 256; Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 238–42.

there was a strong desire to cultivate the most fertile soils, while on the other hand the primitive methods of tillage required the land to be as easily worked as possible. It was difficult or even impossible to till heavy clays with the equipment available in the early Middle Ages. The combination of the fertility of the top soil, the ease or difficulty of tilling it, and the efficiency of the actual agricultural implements was to have a considerable influence on the choice of areas and regions for colonisation activities during the high medieval expansion of settlement.

From the end of the Viking Age and throughout the first medieval centuries certain improvements occurred in farming technology in Scandinavia, such as the increased use of iron in farming implements. The iron shares of ards and ploughs became considerably larger between 1000 and 1200,²² and iron-shod wooden shovels also came into use at this time. The working of heavier soils would therefore have become easier on the clayey soils of valleys and flatlands to which the focus of settlement shifted. The Swedish colonists who made their way to Finland in the high Middle Ages settled only in such coastal areas, north of the Gulf of Finland and east of the Gulf of Bothnia, where they could cultivate relatively light clayey soils similar to those of the Mälars region and other low-lying parts of eastern Sweden.²³

The importance of soil consistency as a factor determining and limiting the possibilities for settlement expansion into previously unoccupied areas is particularly evident in Finland. Both in the south-western coastal area and along the inland water systems in southern Finland, late Iron Age settlement was distinctly concentrated in areas with fine-grained and easily worked deposits, such as Littorina clays on the coast and clayey soils containing sand and silt in the inland regions. In the Middle Ages settlement also spread to flatlands dominated by heavy glacial clays, which required improvements in agricultural technology that are not completely known, although larger iron ardshares were no doubt one of them. In addition, the thirteenth century saw the spread from the south and the east, from Estonia and Novgorod, of the forked plough (*socha*) into many areas of Finland. This plough type was considerably more effective than the western curved bow ard which had previously dominated. Improved methods of tillage together with the Finnish practice of combining arable farming with slash-and-burn cultivation made it possible to

22 J. Myrdal, *Medeltidens åkerbruk: Agrarteknik i Sverige ca 1000 till 1520* (Nordiska museets Handlingar, 105, Borås, 1985), pp. 89–91, 108–14, 151–3; J. Myrdal and J. Söderberg, *Kontinuitetens dynamik: Agrar ekonomi i 1500-talets Sverige* (Stockholm Studies in Economic History, 15, Stockholm, 1991), pp. 396–417.

23 E. Orrman, 'Om geologiska faktorerers inverkan på bebyggelsen i södra Finland mot slutet av järnåldern och under tidig medeltid', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 72 (1987), pp. 174–80.

cultivate the heavy clayey soils of southern Finland. The Swedish population along the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland practised solely arable farming and did not spread into these inland areas.

The expansion of Karelian settlement from the twelfth century, from the shores of Lake Ladoga to areas completely dominated by moraines, was dependent on the command of a special technique of slash-and-burn cultivation which permitted the growing of rye even in heavy coniferous forests on moraine soils (see below). This technique was not used by the western Finns, the earliest inhabitants of the area between lakes Päijänne and Ladoga, whose colonisation activities were limited to the scarce areas of fine-grained deposits, and who were therefore unable to expand into eastern Finland.

The maximum extent of medieval settlement

The extent of high medieval settlement in terms of numbers of farmsteads or holdings cannot be safely determined for any of the Nordic countries. Medieval sources of a standard like that of the English Domesday Book are completely lacking. There is, however, information in Icelandic sources on which a more nuanced understanding may be based, and the dated place-name types of Norway offer better opportunities than elsewhere for reconstructing the development of settlement. Despite insufficient written sources, there have been attempts, particularly persistent in Norway, to calculate the size and extent of settlements, usually expressed as the number of rural holdings or households.

A number of estimates of settlement and population in Denmark around the mid-thirteenth century have been based on *King Valdemar's Land Register* (see Chapter 9) and a few other roughly contemporaneous sources. Both in Denmark and Sweden, where settlement was mostly grouped in villages and hamlets with varying numbers of holdings, there have been attempts to establish the size and extent of settlement via data on the collection of Peter's Pence. This method has, however, proved itself unsatisfactory.

In Norway and the Norse Atlantic colonies, however, settlement largely consisted of individually named farmsteads. Norwegian historians have combined information in medieval documentary sources with a range of criteria for estimating the number of named medieval farms on the local, regional and national levels at different times, such as the presence of Iron Age burials and other archaeological finds within the boundaries of the named farms, the datable suffixes of farm names, and seventeenth-century registers of land-rent. These investigations have resulted in fairly reliable estimates of the number of named farms in the first half of the fourteenth century, when medieval

settlement had reached its greatest extent, but there is no equally safe method for establishing the number of unnamed holdings into which such farms had by then been subdivided.

The described methods cannot be used to evaluate the extent of settlement in Finland. Here, small villages and hamlets predominated in the south and more dispersed settlement towards the east. For most Finnish regions later fiscal sources contain information on old, partly high medieval, units used for the collection of various dues and taxes. The number of such units usually reflects the number of taxable rural holdings at the time when the dues in question were introduced. As regards Iceland, information on the payers of certain taxes, in practice the farmers of rural holdings, is available for some dates.

Estimates of settlement, expressed as the number of rural holdings in the first half of the fourteenth century, are both approximate and uncertain. Nevertheless, the best calculations of this type give a rough idea of the extent of high medieval settlement in the various parts of Scandinavia (Table 10.1).²⁴

In Iceland written sources suggest that settlement had already achieved its maximum medieval extent in the eleventh century. At the turn of the twelfth century the number of heads of rural households with full rights in society was 4,560. As Iceland was an agriculturally marginal area the deterioration of climate from the twelfth century led to difficulties for less favourably located farms, notably sites at the highest elevations, many of which were permanently abandoned. Temporary desertion of holdings was caused by volcanic eruptions, various epidemics and famine. Altogether, these factors led to a decrease in the number of holdings.

The Black Death of 1348–1350 and later occurrences of plague decimated Scandinavian populations to such a degree that, with the exception of Finland and some peripheral areas in other Nordic countries which the plague did not reach, the expansion of settlement came to a halt and a period of decline and

²⁴ For the Danish realm see Christensen, 'Danmarks befolkning og bebyggelse', p. 46; V. Niitemaa, *Baltian historia* (Porvoo, 1959), pp. 42, 68. For the Norwegian realm see L. Marthinsen, 'Maksimum og minimum: Norsk busetnadshistorie etter DNØ', in K. Haarstad et al. (eds.), *Innsikt og utsyn: Festskrift til Jørn Sandnes (Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, Skriftserie fra Historisk institutt, 12, Trondheim, 1996)*, pp. 156–7; J. Sandnes, 'Ødegårdsprosjektet og tallet på gårdsbruk i Norge i høgmiddelalderen', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 58 (Oslo, 1979), p. 409; Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt*, pp. 89–90; M. M. Lárússon, 'Busetnad, Island: Bebyggelse', *KLNM*, 2 (1957), cols. 373–4; C. L. Vebæk, 'Kolonisation, Kolonisation af Grønland', *KLNM*, 8 (1963), cols. 652–3. For the Swedish realm see A. Schück, 'Ur Sveriges medeltida befolkningshistoria', in Schück (ed.) *Befolkning under medeltiden*, pp. 163–4; E. Orrman, 'Ett försök att beräkna bebyggelsens omfattning i Finland vid utgången av högmedeltiden', in Haarstad et al. (eds.), *Innsikt og utsyn*, pp. 139–40.

Table 10.1 High medieval rural settlement in Scandinavia

Realm and region	Number of rural holdings
Danish realm	
Present-day Denmark	102,000 / 112,500
Provinces in present-day south Sweden and Germany	52,000 / 63,000
Duchy of Estonia	6,000
Norwegian realm	
Present-day Norway	64,000 (75,000)
Bohuslän, Jämtland	7,000
Iceland	3,800
Greenland	300
Swedish realm	
The Swedish provinces	75,000
Finland	13,000

Sources: See note 24.

stagnation set in. This regression continued to the mid-fifteenth century when a new upturn appears to have started, manifesting itself more generally in the early Modern Period (Chapter 18).

Means of sustenance

Most of the medieval sedentary population of Scandinavia based its existence on a combination of agriculture and animal husbandry. In terms of agrarian technology the Nordic region had been part of the west and central European cultural sphere since prehistoric times, and the systems of cultivation and the tillage technology that were employed at the end of the Viking Age had parallels there. It was also from these parts of Europe that many innovations spread to Scandinavia in the Middle Ages. The eastern parts of Finland were, however, a distinct exception to the western character of Scandinavian agriculture. In these parts influences from north-western Russia and the Baltic lands were prominent.

Owing to the very varied conditions food production took somewhat different forms in various parts of Scandinavia. There were considerable differences between southern and northern, low-lying and high-lying areas in the relative importance of grain cultivation and animal husbandry. Even within a single country the possibilities for ensuring food supply varied considerably. Throughout the Middle Ages Denmark continuously exported grain,

and under normal conditions Sweden was self-sufficient. Despite the scarcity of land suitable for cultivation, Norway was potentially self-sufficient but the favourable exchange of foreign grain for exported fish led increasingly to the import of the former and a decline of domestic grain cultivation in the western and northern coastal districts. From the second half of the thirteenth century Norway therefore became dependent on Baltic grain imported by Hanseatic traders. In Iceland the modest cultivation of grain could not reduce the need for considerable grain imports and Greenland was totally dependent on such imports.

In addition to cultivation and animal husbandry the Nordic farmer sought to diversify his economy wherever possible, exploiting all available resources as optimally as possible. Hunting and fishing were widespread practices which under favourable conditions and in areas less suited to agriculture could play a major role. The production of iron from lake and bog ore was important in many areas. Timber was felled not only for individual needs but also for sale and even export in the Middle Ages. The mining and quarrying of certain types of rock were of local importance.

The various resources of outlying areas were often exploited in order to satisfy foreign demand, which could therefore lead to the accumulation of wealth. However, it was not generally the producers who gained from this, but rather those who were able to control production and the distribution to the international market.

The various activities of the Nordic farmer were carried out within the framework of a customary annual cycle fashioned in accordance with local conditions. During times of the year when farming activities were impractical people devoted themselves to other tasks, such as fishing, hunting and making iron. Accordingly, the long dark winters, with deep snow and ice, were by no means times of inactivity, but were used for a wide range of activities that were partly facilitated by the ice and snow.

Agriculture

Until the mid-fourteenth century the Scandinavian Middle Ages were a period of agricultural changes and development. The systems of cultivation that emerged then continued to be practised in their essential aspects until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

At the end of the Viking Age arable farming was already the predominant form of grain cultivation in almost all parts of Scandinavia. The most widespread Viking Age system of cultivation was continuous cropping (Danish *alsæd*) in infields, largely without fallow periods, a method that required

sufficient manuring. In Denmark, Norway and Sweden annual cropping appears to have come into use on fertile soils during the first centuries AD, replacing or supplementing older, more extensive forms of cultivation. On the light and less fertile soils of the western parts of Denmark a more extensive system of cultivation was practised, by which fields were cultivated continuously for several years (4–10) after which they were left uncultivated (German *Feldgraswirtschaft*).²⁵ In Finland, on the other hand, slash-and-burn farming played a major role and grain cultivation can be characterised as a combination of arable and ‘swidden’ farming (see below).

In the early and high Middle Ages grain cultivation changed in large areas; a number of innovations spread from the south and the west to the northern parts of Europe and completely new and improved systems of cultivation emerged. However, the older systems were not completely replaced, but survived in many places into the Modern Period. The innovations in question were aimed primarily at improving cultivation techniques and expanding the areas under cultivation; in the central agricultural regions of Denmark and Sweden this was to the detriment of animal husbandry. Here, cattle stocks appear to have diminished, a trend that is also known from western and central Europe.

The shift to systematic crop rotation, i.e. two- and three-field rotation, took place during the first medieval centuries in large parts of Denmark, Sweden and Finland, and in smaller areas in Norway, bringing about marked changes and more effective production. The system of two-course rotation meant that half or so of the fields under cultivation were sown while the other half remained fallow. In the three-course system the cultivated area consisted of two-thirds of the total area, half sown with winter rye and half with barley, while only one-third lay fallow. There were a number of variants between continuous cropping and pure two-course rotation. In the most extensive agricultural areas of Norway, for instance, there developed a practice by which only a quarter of the infields lay fallow.

In Denmark the two-course system was not widely adopted and the three-course system became the predominant form of crop rotation. This was widespread on the fertile moraine clays or clayey moraine soils of the eastern parts of the kingdom: eastern Jylland, the Danish islands and Skåne. On the other hand, neither two- nor three-course rotation gained a foothold in the western and northern parts of Jylland where coarser-grained and less fertile,

²⁵ Hedeager and Kristiansen, ‘Oldtid’, pp. 168–75, 180–3; Porsmose, ‘Middelalder’, pp. 288–9; Frandsen, *Vang og tægt*, p. 256; Myrdal, *Jordbruget*, pp. 62–3.

mainly sandy soils predominate. In these areas the more extensive cultivation systems survived, and in especially favourable locations continuous cropping went on throughout the Middle Ages.²⁶

In Sweden and Finland the distribution of crop rotation in the high Middle Ages displays a pattern similar to that of Denmark, but here two-course rotation became the common practice in the most fertile areas, i.e. on glacial and post-glacial soils in flat terrain and valleys at lower elevations. A large continuous area of such rotation existed at the beginning of the fourteenth century in the Mälars region and Östergötland. In parts of Västergötland and in Gotland all three cultivation systems – continuous cropping, two- and three-course rotation – were practised. In the Middle Ages two-crop rotation spread northwards along the west coast of the Gulf of Bothnia. In the rest of Sweden, where moraine soils predominated, annual cropping remained the sole system of cultivation throughout the Middle Ages; this was the situation in the South Swedish Highlands and in the provinces north of the Mälars region. In these areas animal husbandry played a considerably more prominent role than in the central areas of arable farming.

Two-field rotation was also adopted in the central areas of Finland, where continuous cropping had earlier been practised, and spread much as in Sweden. The system was first introduced from Sweden in the south-western regions and expanded from there. In the early Modern Period it was still spreading inland and along the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia. In these regions, too, the fields were mainly on clayey and silty soil.²⁷

In Norway, where animal husbandry was important across the whole country, continuous cropping continued throughout the Middle Ages in the west and in the mountain regions. On the most extensive cultivable soils south and east of Trondheimsfjord and in Østlandet the two-field system of crop-rotation was adopted. The provincial law for Trøndelag (*Frøstupingsløg*), reflecting conditions in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, stipulated that tenants should let their land lie fallow every fourth year and this regulation was included in the general rural law-code from 1274, the so-called 'Landlaw', which was probably applied to the grain-growing areas of Østlandet as well. Within the system of continuous cropping there were local variants dictated by geographic conditions. Palynological studies show that on the Atlantic coast intensive farming was, from the mid-eighth century, practised in similar forms as in many places along the coast of the North Sea. In this form of cultivation,

26 Frandsen, *Vang og tægt*, pp. 255–6, 265–8.

27 Kaukiainen, 'Suomen asuttaminen', pp. 73–9; A. Vikkula, S.-L. Seppälä et al., 'The ancient field of Rapola', *Fennoscandia archaeologica*, II (1994), pp. 41–59.

known as *moldbruk* (German *Plaggenwirtschaft*), the fields were fertilised with turf from outlying areas, seaweed, algae and fish offal.²⁸

According to Karl-Erik Frandsen crop rotation spread to Denmark from Germany and Poland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although earlier dates have also been suggested. In Sweden human-geographical studies of fossil field landscapes have suggested that two-course rotation had started to emerge around AD 1000, which would, however, imply that the shift to crop rotation occurred earlier in Sweden than in Denmark. Two-course rotation was at any rate well established in Sweden in the thirteenth century, as it appears to be the predominant form of cultivation in several of the provincial laws that were first recorded in that century. Such rotation probably spread to Finland before the mid-fourteenth century, although the earliest evidence for this – mentions of open fields of villages and hamlets divided into two parts by fences – date from the close of that century.

Until the twelfth century the favourable climate made it possible to grow grain throughout the settled coastal regions of Iceland. From the close of the century the climate deteriorated and grain cultivation was limited to the more favourable areas in the south and west. As in Norway cultivation took the form of continuous cropping, but it played a minor role in comparison with animal husbandry.

Barley cultivation predominated in the Nordic countries at the beginning of the Middle Ages but in the following centuries considerable changes took place. Rye appears originally to have been a weed, but it spread as a cultivated species from north-eastern Germany in the form of winter rye to Denmark (including Skåne) from the tenth century; with the spread of three-course rotation it became as common as barley. Barley was used both for bread and malt while rye was everywhere used solely for bread. In Sweden, too, the cultivation of rye increased in the Middle Ages, partly because it was favoured by the Church and the Crown. However, in the late Middle Ages rye cultivation was still restricted to the provinces around Lake Mälaren and the adjoining regions to the south-east. Accordingly, barley remained the most widely cultivated cereal in Sweden throughout the Middle Ages. This was also true of Norway, although some rye was grown there. Barley predominated in Finnish cultivation, too, even though rye gained importance in the high Middle Ages. In the eastern area of slash-and-burn cultivation rye was the main cereal.

²⁸ M. Kvamme, 'Lokale pollendiagram og bosetningshistorie', in U. Näsman and J. Lind (eds.), *Folkevandringstiden i Norden: En krisetid mellem ældre og yngre jernalder* (Aarhus, 1988), pp. 88–9, 92–4.

Oats were important locally in many places, especially in Norway, where it was the second most important crop. Oats were often grown in barren soils and could sustain a colder and wetter climate than barley, but in Norway barley and oats were also commonly grown together as *blandkorn* (mixed cereals). Wheat, a luxury product – also needed for the host of the Eucharist – was grown sparingly. Beans, turnips and other root crops were also cultivated, as was flax in some regions. Hops, cabbage and onions were also known, and apples were grown, especially in some favourable regions in western Norway.

In many areas more effective implements were introduced with two- and three-course rotation. As suggested by the Swedish agrarian historian Janken Myrdal, the close connection between various innovations permits us to speak of the distribution of a complete agricultural-system or technocomplex.²⁹ The level of agricultural technology in the central farming regions of Scandinavia is regarded as corresponding to that of central and western Europe.

Marks left by plough shares have been discovered in Viking Age fields in Jylland, showing that the turning plough was spreading from the south at that time. Ploughs were also used in the Viking Age in certain parts of Norway, but it was not until the Middle Ages that they became more widespread in Scandinavia. The heavy west European wheel-plough, requiring several draught animals, became the common ploughing implement in Denmark in the high Middle Ages. In many places, however, ards of older types were used throughout the Middle Ages. In Norway, where spade tilling in small fields and steep hillsides was common throughout the Middle Ages, ploughs were mainly used in the southern and western parts of the country and possibly in Trøndelag as well, but the ard remained the most common means of working the soil. In Sweden, too, the ard retained its dominant position in most parts of the country, including the central agricultural regions around Lake Mälaren and in Östergötland. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries it was made more effective by the introduction of larger and longer iron shares. The earlier shares were about 10 cm long and weighed approximately 0.3 kg; the later ones were 20 cm long and weighed 1.0 kg so that the soil could be worked to a greater depth, weeds controlled more effectively, and fallow fields more easily broken up. In Sweden, it was only in certain parts of Västergötland that the turning plough came into use in the high Middle Ages, and it was not until the late Middle Ages that it began to expand northwards.

29 Myrdal, *Medeltidens åkerbruk*, pp. 151–8; Myrdal and Söderberg, *Kontinuitetens dynamik*, pp. 417–26; Myrdal, 'Agrarteknik och samhälle under två tusen år', in *Folkevandringstiden i Norden*, pp. 198–203, 208–10, 217–24; Myrdal, *Jordbruket*, pp. 42–3.

In Norway and Sweden the development of tillage technology was generally determined by the need to have light implements requiring few draught animals. Accordingly, the wheel-plough had disappeared from Swedish agriculture by the high Middle Ages and was replaced by lighter models requiring only a pair of oxen or one horse, equipment that appears to have been common in Norway. The development of the ard followed a similar pattern through the late Middle Ages and by the fifteenth century lighter and more efficient plough and ard types were being used.

In terms of agricultural technology we have already seen that Finland was a transitional zone between east and west. In the western and south-western parts of the country western variants of the ard were used. The eastern forked plough (*socha*) spread from the south and east into the areas of arable farming north of the Gulf of Finland and inland into the provinces of Uusimaa (Nyland) and Häme. There were different variants of the forked plough for arable and swidden cultivation; it was later described as a highly efficient implement that can be compared in certain situations to the light types of turning plough that were used in Finland in the eighteenth century.

In slash-and-burn cultivation forest trees were felled and burnt so that cereals could be grown on the cleared plots. Such cultivation had been practised in many areas of Scandinavia since prehistoric times, mostly to complement the arable. In the province of Bohuslän in present-day western Sweden there is archaeological evidence of recurrent slash-and-burn cultivation of cereals in deciduous forests.³⁰ However, in the Middle Ages the importance of slash-and-burn cultivation greatly diminished on the Scandinavian peninsula, although as a rule new fields were cleared by burning before they were taken into cultivation. Medieval documents provide little information on slash-and-burn cultivation, but place-names include elements pointing to this practice. In Norway, these include toponyms with the prefix *kos/kas* and the suffix *sve/svid*. Similar names are found in Iceland, Denmark and Sweden. Finland, however, differed in this respect from the other Nordic countries. There, slash-and-burn technology, in a number of variants, had a central role in medieval grain cultivation.

The western and southern coastal regions and the southern inland areas of Finland, with their glacial and post-glacial clayey and silty soils in low-lying locations, can be characterised as the extreme north-eastern margins of the central and west European region of arable farming. Further to the east, i.e.

30 G. Lindman, *Svedjebruket i Munkeröd: Ett exempel på periodiskt svedjande från yngre stendålder till medeltid i södra Bohusläns kustland* (Riksantikvarieämbetet, *Arkeologiska undersökningar, Skrifter*, 3, Göteborg, 1993), pp. 107–15.

east of Lake Päijänne where moraines predominate, grain was mostly grown by slash-and-burn methods in the Middle Ages, but arable farming was also practised to a limited extent at suitable sites on fine soils. Slash-and-burn methods played an important role in the western and southern areas of arable farming in Finland, too, but here the technique differed in many respects from that used in the east.

In the west, swiddens (slash-and-burn plots) were cleared in deciduous or mixed forest where foliiferous trees predominated. These plots were used for a few years to grow mainly rye and barley, but also oats, wheat and turnips. Following this, the area was left to revert to woodland. After 15–30 years slash-and-burn methods could again be used to bring it back into cultivation.

In the east, within the slash-and-burn region proper, a different method enabled farmers to practise swidden cultivation in coniferous forest, particularly in spruce forest and also in coarse stands. These swiddens were used mostly for growing rye, but only an eastern variety adapted to this form of cultivation. In the sixteenth century barley and oats were also grown in swiddens. As a rule, a single area or plot was sown only once or at most a couple of times, after which it was left to revert to forest. This method of swidden cultivation, known as *huuhta* in Finnish, was introduced from the east with the expansion of Karelian settlement into the eastern moraine regions of Finland.³¹

As the eastern form of slash-and-burn cultivation required very large areas of forest, it was long believed that people practising it had an almost semi-nomadic lifestyle. Later research has proved this wrong, even though lack of forest land often led to relocation of dwelling sites. As this type of cultivation made it relatively easy to start grain-growing in the large regions of coniferous forest, it opened the way for colonisation even over large distances.

It has been suggested that swidden cultivation requires a smaller input of labour than arable methods, but in the northern regions the issue is more complicated. On virgin soil it takes less labour to use slash-and-burn methods than to clear new fields. However, when a field has been cleared considerably less labour is required to grow grain than in swidden cultivation. It

31 A. M. Soininen, *Vanha maataloutemme (Historiallisia Tutkimuksia, 96, Forssa, 1975)*, pp. 54–76; E. Orrman, 'Svedjebruk på 1500-talets finska kungsgårdar', in B. Larsson (ed.), *Svedjebruk och röjningsbränning i Norden – terminologi, datering, metoder (Skrifter om skogs- och lantbrukshistoria, 7, Stockholm, 1995)*, pp. 95–101; M. Sarmela, 'Swidden cultivation and environment', in Larsson (ed.), *Svedjebruk och röjningsbränning*, pp. 148–54.

was, for example, the large input of labour in the latter that caused the shift to arable methods in north-western and western Russia in the late Middle Ages.

Data on yields are not available for the Nordic region until the close of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Period. In general, however, such data are taken to indicate the earlier situation. It is estimated that medieval grain yields in Denmark and Norway were three to five times the sown amount, as was the case in western Europe. In Sweden, the fertile clayey plains under two-course rotation around Lake Mälaren yielded three to four times the amount sown in the late Middle Ages, but on the moraine soils under continuous cropping in the southern inland areas the yield was only two- to threefold. In the arable farming regions of Finland yields appear to have been on the same level as in the Mälär region, possibly because the grain acquired good germination properties by being dried in heat and smoke in the threshing sheds. Under favourable conditions the swiddens in coniferous forests in Finland have in modern times given twenty- to thirtyfold yields, in exceptional cases up to a hundredfold yield.

Animal husbandry

Arable farming required some form of fertilisation, which made animal husbandry a prerequisite for grain cultivation except in the typical slash-and-burn areas. The importance of animal husbandry is particularly evident in Norway. Here the *Frøstupingsløg* of Trøndelag laid down that tenants sowing a certain amount of seed were required to keep a cow and some smaller livestock, thus ensuring the continued fertility of the soil. Animals were to be let out on fallow fields so they would be manured, and manure accumulated during the winter was to be spread there. These regulations were repeated in the national Landlaw of 1274, and were probably applied to the arable farming districts of Østlandet as well as those of Trøndelag. There is, however, no mention of fallow fields and manuring in the earlier provincial code for Vestlandet, *Gulapingsløg*, which is generally taken to indicate that the number of livestock relative to the amount of arable land was large enough to produce sufficient manure for continuous cropping.

Information on livestock numbers on typical farms in the early and high Middle Ages is quite sparse and the available data refer almost exclusively to estates owned by the Church and the nobility. The Norwegian provincial laws are exceptional in that they give numbers of cows kept on family farms in the high Middle Ages, and these have been interpreted as the norm. In Trøndelag

an average-size farm would thus have twelve cows whereas a small farm in Vestlandet would have six. In Denmark it has been estimated that around AD 1300 an average farm had only two cows and two oxen, two horses and ten sheep, which, in the light of excavations of Iron Age farm buildings, appears to be less than in the preceding periods. In Sweden preserved inventories indicate that the livestock of a farm in the central parts of the country would normally consist of a couple of oxen and three or four cows. As in Denmark this was less than in the late Iron Age.

Bovines were the most important domestic animals and necessary for arable farming. Nevertheless, the general trend in the first centuries in medieval times was the growing role of grain cultivation in relation to animal husbandry. Oxen were used as draught animals in large areas, for example in Denmark, southern Sweden, south-western Finland, and also in Iceland and parts of Norway. Elsewhere in Scandinavia horses were the common draught animals, and there was also a clear tendency for horses to replace oxen as draught animals in arable farming, not least in Denmark. Sheep, pigs and goats were generally kept. The raising of sheep was particularly important in the Atlantic islands and in western and northern Norway where goats were also common. Hens, geese and other fowl were common in places, and bee-keeping occurred in Denmark and southern Sweden.

It is known that livestock were kept in sheds or barns during the winter in Nordic regions as long ago as the early Iron Age (first centuries AD), a custom that did not gain ground in England and France until the eleventh century. When domestic animals were kept indoors in winter the accumulation of manure facilitated a more effective fertilisation of fields, as attested by the above-mentioned Norwegian law texts. On the other hand, it might also have led to an imbalance in the manuring of fields. Indeed, in Denmark there is archaeological evidence that rural villages and hamlets were relocated to new sites within the areas exploited by them every couple of centuries. This 'migration' of Danish villages continued until the eleventh and twelfth centuries or even as late as the close of the thirteenth century. One of the reasons suggested for this is over-fertilisation and pollution of the village sites by winter manure, which had not been spread more widely. This would lead to relocation of settlements, with the advantage of using the former over-fertilised sites as fields. Observations from Falster suggest that the inadequate spreading of winter manure prior to the introduction of crop rotation resulted in the depletion of the infields under continuous cropping. The shift to two- and three-course cultivation and the use of the turning plough made it possible to correct this imbalance. The benefits of relocation were thus lost, and it came to an end.

Similar relocations also occurred in the southern Swedish highlands, in the southern part of medieval Sweden.³²

Animal husbandry was more important than grain cultivation in northern Norway and in the western coastal areas from Møre in the north to Hordaland in the south. Livestock played an even greater role in Iceland, Greenland, Føroyar and Shetland, and in places could be kept outdoors throughout the year. This is illustrated by the name Føroyar (ON *Færeyyjar*), originally meaning 'sheep islands', where individual flocks of sheep could total several thousand animals.

The deterioration of climate which reduced grain cultivation in Iceland gave animal husbandry an even stronger position in the economy. Sheep-raising expanded at the cost of bovines, which is attested by the fact that it became necessary to import butter into Iceland in the late Middle Ages. The expanding sheep economy created conditions for an extensive production of homespun (a coarse and durable cloth made from wool; *vaðmál* in ON, Scottish 'wadmal') in the farming households. In contrast to the large-scale production of wool in Europe, with its male workforce, it was the women of the Icelandic farms who were responsible for the making of woollen products. Female weavers produced homespun at home or at the farms of those who commissioned the work.³³ In the high Middle Ages homespun became one of Iceland's main export articles.

The extensive animal husbandry in Iceland had far-reaching ecological effects at an early stage. When the Norse colonists arrived towards the end of the ninth century one-third of the island was covered by birch forests. These were, however, rapidly depleted, partly by slash-and-burn farming and the production of charcoal but mainly because of the expanding sheep-raising economy.

At the beginning of the Middle Ages animal husbandry in Greenland was similar to that in Iceland. Remains of large shelters for both cattle and sheep point to considerable numbers of domestic animals, including pigs and horses. The importance of sheep is indicated by the fact that homespun was exported

32 Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 226–31; Myrdal and Söderberg, *Kontinuitetens dynamik*, p. 197; J. A. Pedersen, 'Gammelbyernes fortolkning', in Gissel (ed.), *Falsterundersøgelsen*, pp. 171–9; Myrdal, 'Agrarteknik och samhälle', pp. 193–7; S. Welinder et al., *Jordbrukets första femtusen år 4000 f. Kr.–1000 e.Kr* (J. Myrdal (ed.), *Det svenska jordbrukets historia*, 1, Borås 1999), p. 286.

33 N. Damsholt, 'The role of the Icelandic women in the sagas and in the production of homespun cloth', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 9 (1984), pp. 75–90; H. Þorláksson, 'Arbeidskvinnens, særlig veverskens økonomiske stilling på Island', in H. Gunneng and B. Strand (eds.), *Kvinnans økonomiske stilling under nordisk medeltid: Uppsatser, Framlagda vid ett kvinnohistoriskt symposium i Kungälv 8–12 oktober 1979* (Lindome, 1989), pp. 58–9.

from Greenland. Great efforts were made to ensure the supply of winter fodder, with the growing of grass for hay in the vicinity of the farms being improved by fertilisation. Evidence of canal construction has even been discovered – the canals were intended to ensure a regular supply of water to the pastures.

Efforts to use all available resources of fodder led to the regular use of outlying pastures already before the Middle Ages. This is particularly evident in Norway where seasonally occupied sites (ON sing. and pl. *sætr*) were established high up in the valleys and in mountain areas as early as the late Stone Age. Domestic animals were driven to these pastures in the summer and dwellings and shelters for livestock were erected for regular use. Seasonal sites of this kind could also be used for the collection of winter fodder, as well as for hunting and fishing, and the production of iron from lake and bog ore. The seasonal utilisation of outfield resources was regulated in detail in the Norwegian law texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Colonists brought the *sætr* system with them from Norway to Iceland, Greenland and the Norse island communities further south. Similar exploitation of the resources of outlying areas most probably also occurred in Sweden in the Middle Ages, although written evidence for it is lacking.

In Norway the highest *sætr* sites were at locations up to 1400 m above sea level and in Greenland at 300–400 m. The farms and their *sætr* sites could be considerable distances apart, often more than 10 kilometres. In Norway and Iceland a *sætr* could be as much as 40–50 kilometres from the farm.

Extraction of natural resources

At the beginning of the Middle Ages the demand for iron was growing in Scandinavia, not least because of its use in agricultural implements. Calculations, albeit highly uncertain, suggest that Viking Age farms in Sweden each owned an average of 40–50 kg of various iron objects.³⁴ Notwithstanding this relatively small amount, the supply of iron was fundamentally important.

Until the second half of the twelfth century only ore from lakes and bogs was used for producing iron. Deposits of this kind are found throughout Scandinavia and are particularly plentiful in Sweden and Norway where they often occur in areas peripheral to the central agrarian regions. Iron-making also required a large supply of wood for fuel and charcoal.

We have seen that Scandinavian production of iron from bog ore started around the middle of the first millennium BC (Chapter 3). In the Middle

34 P. Hansson, *Samhälle och järn i Sverige under järnåldern och äldre medeltiden: Exemplet Närke* (Aun, 13, Uppsala, 1989), p. 73.

Ages the most important iron-making regions were Småland, Hälsingland, Dalarna and Jämtland in present-day Sweden, and Trøndelag and Telemark in Norway.

The production of iron took place within the framework of the farming economy but the scale of production and its organisation varied both chronologically and regionally. In the period AD 300–600 iron-making was practised on a large scale in Jämtland and Trøndelag; it was apparently organised by leading local chieftains and used in redistributive exchange. Considerable changes occurred later, with the result that in the Middle Ages iron-making from bog and lake deposits became an auxiliary activity practised on a small scale within the farming economy and was mainly intended to meet the demand of iron in the immediate region. Local iron-making in the inland regions of Finland appears to have been of a similar nature.

On the other hand, there was large-scale medieval production of iron in the marginal mountain areas of the inland region of Telemark in southern Norway, mainly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This, ceased quite abruptly, however, possibly as a result of the lack of forest for charcoal and firewood. Quite considerable quantities of iron were also produced in Iceland in the Middle Ages but the lack of firewood brought an end to these activities in the fifteenth century. There were also attempts to make iron in Greenland.³⁵

Extraction of iron from lake and bog ores was undertaken using the low technology process of bloomery furnaces which produced malleable iron (bloom) directly (a different process from the making of iron indirectly in blast furnaces). Blast furnaces utilising mined ore were introduced in Sweden in the second half of the twelfth century and led to radical changes in iron metallurgy; they were capital-intensive and could not be worked as a subsidiary activity alongside farming. The use of blast furnaces led to a marked decrease in the use of lake and bog ore at the beginning of the thirteenth century. There was, however, a recovery in farming areas where iron metallurgy based on lake and bog ore became a subsidiary source of income in the farming economy and continued into the early Modern Period.

Estimates of medieval iron-making from lake and bog ores have been made on the basis of deposits of slag. These show that production was generally on a small scale, although in some places large quantities were made. At Mösstrond

35 G. Magnusson, *Lågteknisk järnhantering i Jämtlands län (Jernkontorets Bergshistoriska Skriftserie, 22, Stockholm, 1986)*, pp. 261–71, 297–395; I. Martens, *Jernvinning på Mösstrond i Telemark: En studie i teknikk, busetning og økonomi (Norske oldfunn, 12, Oslo, 1988)*, p. 123–5; L. F. Stenvik, 'Samfunnsstrukturer i Trøndelag i jernalderen', in K. Gullberg (ed.), *Järnåldern i Mittnorden: Ett symposium kring nya arkeologiska och ekologiska forskningsrön (Acta Antiqua Ostrobothniensia, 4, Vasa, 1994)*, pp. 186–93.

in Telemark a settlement of some twenty farms produced 7–10 metric tons of iron per year at the beginning of the Middle Ages. However, annual production in the present territory of Sweden has been estimated at less than 100 metric tons of iron in the Viking Age and the early Middle Ages, which means that each province produced only a few tons. These amounts could satisfy the needs of the immediate region, but did not permit any appreciable exports. The export of Swedish iron that came into operation in the high Middle Ages was largely based on large-scale production of mined ore refined in blast furnaces. The extent of this production is shown by the fact that the annual export via Stockholm to Lübeck was around 900 metric tons in the late fourteenth century.³⁶

The timber resources of the forests were not only important for the economy of farmers; in the high Middle Ages lumber could be sold to the towns, a trade facilitated by winter transport conditions. It was also exported where cheap sea transport was available; from the thirteenth century lumber was sent from western and southern Norway to England.

Within the framework of the rural economy certain types of rock were also exploited for different purposes. In many places in Norway various types of vessels were made of soapstone (steatite) and some were exported. Rock was also quarried to make whetstones, quern- and millstones. Whetstones from Eidsborg in Telemark were distributed throughout a large area that included England and Poland.³⁷ In Gotland the manufacture of limestone baptismal fonts was on a scale that amounted to mass production.

In Norway salt made by boiling sea water and burning seaweed appears to have satisfied a limited local demand; it was even sufficient for export to the inland regions of Sweden. More extensive importation of salt into Norway cannot be documented until the fourteenth century.

Fishing and hunting

All over Scandinavia various forms of fishing and hunting were practised alongside farming. Maritime or lacustrine fishing was common, as was hunting in outlying areas. Hunting was most important in the north where there were large areas lacking sedentary settlement. Palynological studies show that at

36 Magnusson, *Lågtekisk järnhantering*, pp. 273–80; Martens, *Jernvinning*, p. 125.

37 S. Myrvoll, 'The trade in Eidsborg hones over Skien in the Medieval Period', in T. Edgren (ed.), *Proceedings of the Third Nordic Conference on the Application of Scientific Methods in Archaeology, Mariehamn, Åland, Finland, 8–11. October 1984* (Iskos, 5, Helsinki, 1985), pp. 43, 45; A. Christophersen, 'Ports and trade in Norway during the transition to historical time', in O. Crumlin-Pedersen (ed.), *Aspects of Maritime Scandinavia AD 200–1200* (Roskilde, 1991), pp. 160–3.

least in Finland the outlying regions were utilised not only for hunting and fishing but also for small-scale slash-and-burn cultivation, presumably to meet the need for grain during stays in the outlying areas. In the northern and north-eastern parts of the Scandinavian peninsula and Finland hunting and fishing were combined in a complex economic system, which included the distribution of the products provided by the Sami and also the direct exploitation of the latter. For this reason, these phenomena are discussed separately below.

Fishing was traditionally an integrated part of the rural economy. For peasant families living on poor soils fish was such an important supplement to the diet, particularly along the coasts, that the term *fisher-farmers* is an apt description of the rural population from prehistoric times to the present day. In the inland and inner reaches of the coast fishing waters were privately owned or belonged collectively to villages and hamlets. Where fishing was carried out on a larger scale it was, as a rule, seasonal. It was then often practised in collective forms with a certain number of farms participating, for example fishing with seine nets. Salmon fishing in the large rivers often led to collective organisation because of the considerable input of labour required, for example in the large rivers flowing into the Gulf of Bothnia.

When it was possible to market the fish – and when suitable ways of conserving the catch were available – fish products became significant items of trade. The growth of urban population in western and central Europe and the regulations of the Roman Catholic church on fasting created market opportunities for Scandinavian fish products. This first became evident in the west along the Norwegian coast, and then spread progressively from south to north in the Baltic.

Cod fishing on a large scale with lines and hooks started to emerge along the coast of Norway at the beginning of the twelfth century, and the catch was preserved by drying. These activities focused on the islands of Lofoten and Vesterålen in northern Norway, where the fishing season lasted from February to March, but cod and other gadoid species were also caught for drying along the rest of the northern and western coast of Norway. The production of dried fish or ‘stockfish’ was carried out by the *fisher-farmers*, a combination that saw the men concentrating their efforts on fishing, while the women were left to take care of domestic animals and what there was of cultivation. In addition, seasonal labour was required for the fisheries. The chieftains of northern Norway, and later also the Crown and the institutions of the Church, had economic interests in this large-scale fishing activity. Not only were they receivers of land rent and other dues from the fishermen, but they organised

fishing themselves, and engaged in the transportation and marketing of the fish.

The town of Bergen in western Norway, strategically situated between the fishing districts of the north and the European markets, became the dominant outlet for the export of stockfish, fish oil and other fish products to various North Sea and Baltic areas. From the second half of the thirteenth century German Hanseatic traders gained control of the Norwegian stockfish trade and expanded its markets. They soon came to dominate the particularly important export of fish from Bergen to England, and by the fourteenth century were largely in control of a market area that also covered north-western continental Europe, the Rhine regions and the Baltic lands.

In Iceland cod fishing appears to have declined in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, probably because of the lack of seasonal labour which resulted from the emergence of numerous smallholdings. From the thirteenth century, however, there was a clear tendency towards more specialised fishing in Iceland with the islands of Vestmannaeyjar in the south and the peninsula of Snæfellsnes in the west being the most important sites. Chieftains and ecclesiastical institutions gained control of the best fishing farms and settlements and controlled the export of stockfish and other fish products that began in the first half of the fourteenth century, initially via Bergen.

In the late twelfth century another centre of export-oriented fishing began to emerge in the southern parts of the Baltic. Large-scale herring fisheries based on the peninsula of Falsterbo and Skanör in south-west Skåne developed in the late summer and early autumn. From the early thirteenth century these became the foundation of the Skåne Fairs which, through taxes, played an important role in the economy of the Danish crown. The Skåne fisheries remained an occupation for freeholders and tenants throughout the Middle Ages, and the fish was prepared and salted down by Danish women. Trade, on the other hand, was monopolised by the Hanseatic traders, who controlled the abundant supplies of salt from Lüneburg which made large-scale export possible. From the thirteenth century there were also important herring fisheries in the Norwegian region of Viken further north, on the coast of present-day Bohuslän. Here, however, the catch was dried rather than salted for export.

The products of peasant fishing were also to become significant items of trade in the northern Baltic region extending into the Gulf of Bothnia and the Gulf of Finland. Here, however, the fish trade remained largely regional, and fishing did not achieve the same importance as cod fishing in the west and herring fishing in the south. Economically most important was salmon fishing in the rivers flowing into the Gulf of Bothnia, which became the object of

the fiscal interests of the Swedish crown and church in the thirteenth century. Baltic herring from the coasts of Finland and fish from the inland lakes, mainly dried pike, became products of regional trade in the late Middle Ages.

At the beginning of the Middle Ages hunting had already become a marginal activity in the central agricultural areas of Scandinavia but retained an important role in the economy of the agrarian population in the outlying areas to the north and north-east. Here, as elsewhere, hunting provided food, but its real importance lay in providing furs and hides. The most important fur-bearing animals, largely caught with various types of traps, included ermine (*Opus album*, 'white-work') and squirrel (*Opus griseum*, 'grey-work') sold in large consignments of more than 10,000 hides. Wolverine, polecat, beaver, otter and the especially valuable marten were also hunted. There was even an international market for elk and reindeer hides. The demand for these products and the existence of channels of distribution from the outlying Nordic regions created conditions for the accumulation of wealth among those who by their own hunting or control of catches were able to supply furs for the international market. In both Sweden and Norway, the Crown at an early stage took steps to share in the proceeds by taxing catches.

Beside furs a number of other commodities fetching high prices were provided by hunting and fishing. Walrus tusks were one such item; to some extent they replaced ivory in western and central Europe where this had at times been in short supply. Walrus hides were used for making rope. Possibly as early as the high Middle Ages eiderdown was exported from Iceland to continental Europe; the Norse-Icelandic term for their commodity, *æðardúnn*, was borrowed in several European languages (e.g. *édredon* in French).

In the interior regions of the Scandinavian peninsula the hunting of fur-bearing animals was, in the high Middle Ages, of some importance in places as far south as 60°N in the Swedish province of Dalarna and also in certain parts of Värmland, but the main hunting regions were further to the north. In the economy of the sedentary population of Finland the hunting of animals for their fur played an important role in those regions north of 61°N; here, high medieval royal and ecclesiastical taxes mainly focused on furs. The coastal provinces of Finland proper and Uusimaa, as well as the Åland archipelago, were exceptions to this but here sealing was important, particularly in Åland.

The importance of the resources of outlying areas was of greatest importance in Greenland where fishing and hunting were necessary both for the supply of food and the production of commodities that could be exported in exchange for products such as grain, lumber and iron. Polar bear, reindeer, hares and various birds were hunted, and as in Iceland and northern and

western Norway, the hunting of seal, walrus and whale played an important role in the economy of the Norse colonists.

The exploitation of outlying areas by the agrarian communities could span considerable distances. In Denmark, the most densely populated of the Nordic countries in the Middle Ages, the radius of action of the farmers, with the exception of trips to market towns, was often no more than a few kilometres within the limits of the village outfields, which were mainly used for agrarian purposes. However, in Denmark as elsewhere, the fishermen of the coasts naturally moved over longer distances. In the agrarian regions of Sweden and Finland outlying resources were exploited at distances of up to twenty kilometres from the home farm. In Norway and Iceland we have seen that the *sætr* system involved the utilisation of pastures even further away.

It was, however, in fishing and hunting that outlying resources were utilised over the greatest distances. In the regions around the Gulf of Bothnia, in the inner parts of Finland, and in the northern parts of Norway, journeys of 100 kilometres or more were in no way uncommon. Finnish farmers residing permanently in the inland provinces of Satakunta and Häme owned property in outlying areas at distances of up to 300 kilometres from their farms. The exploitation of such areas followed fixed rules. In the west Finnish provinces hunting grounds and fishing waters, even in the most distant wilderness, were private property that could be included among the assets of farms, and could be bequeathed and sold. In eastern Finland, however, hunting grounds were not privately owned in this sense; hunting and fishing could be freely practised.

Detailed information on the ownership and exploitation of outlying areas in Finland does not become available until the close of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Period, but the distribution of late Iron Age stray finds indicates that the modes of exploiting these areas had emerged much earlier. The annual stays of several weeks in the wilderness occurred in the late autumn and early winter, the season for fur trapping, and also in the spring and summer, the fishing season. Journeys over long distances were facilitated by the use of skis in winter, and in the summer months the long water systems of interior Finland, often running north–south, permitted regular communications by boat.

However, it was in Greenland that the longest distances to seasonally utilised areas occurred. Here, the Norse colonists regularly undertook annual northward journeys of 600–700 km from the permanently settled areas to the regions around present-day Disco Bay. The northernmost traces of such journeys along the west coast of Greenland have come to light on Ellesmere Island.

The utilisation of outlying areas led to seasonal settlement in many parts of Scandinavia. The *sætr* sites of Norway are one such type of settlement. Simple buildings or shelters for fishermen were erected at fishery sites along the coasts of the Baltic and the Atlantic; in western Norway they are known from prehistoric times. In Finland long-distance hunting and fishing in the wilderness areas was still occurring at the beginning of the Modern Period, as evidenced by traces of buildings erected at far-off sites. They could be simple saunas of block-work construction, but seasonal sites could also consist of several timbered houses or buildings for various purposes. Mostly in the north Norwegian mountain regions, but also in the adjoining Swedish and Finnish areas, oval hut-floors have been found at sites above the tree-line. These constructions, known as *stallo* sites in the Sami language, are regarded by some experts as the remains of buildings connected with the expeditions of the coastal settlers of northern Norway to the Sami territory of Finnmark in the Viking and early Middle Ages. This explanation has, however, been questioned, and the *stallo* sites have been attributed to the Sami population. They have been found as far south as Jämtland.³⁸

*The exploitation of the northern regions of Finnmark
and Lappland*

As a rule, furs from the northern regions are of a higher quality than those from areas further south, and furs from the northern parts of Scandinavia were consequently in particular demand on the international market. One result was that the sedentary population living closest to the northern forests and mountains strove to establish control over hunting for animal furs and the commercial distribution of furs. Competition for these resources, which must have existed in the Iron Age and is known from the Viking and Middle Ages, was partly with the semi-nomadic Sami who made use of the areas in question but lacked the means of power to resist exploitation by the sedentary population in adjoining districts.

Archaeological field work in the past few decades suggests that the Sami, as the indigenous population of the north, occupied the interior of the Scandinavian peninsula approximately as far south as 61°N (cf. Map 11).³⁹ In the eastern parts of the Finnish interior Sami were to be found as far south as about

38 I. Storli, 'Sami Viking Age pastoralism – or "the Fur Trade Paradigm" reconsidered', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 26 (1993), p. 3; C. Carpelan, 'Comments on Sami Viking Age pastoralism – or "the Fur Trade Paradigm" reconsidered', *ibid.*, pp. 22–4.

39 I. Zachrisson, 'Arkeologi och etnicitet: Samisk kultur i mellersta Sverige ca 1–1500', *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift*, 14 (1988), pp. 27–38.

62°N. The Sami, among whom several groups can be distinguished, were not a homogeneous population. In the case of Finland, researchers have suggested that the hunter-fisher populations north of Lake Oulujärvi, i.e. slightly north of 64°N, differed ethnically from their counterparts south of this line.

Throughout the Middle Ages hunting and fishing were the Sami's main means of providing food and sustenance. Summer and winter sites were used following a regular annual rhythm. Tame reindeer mainly served as draught or pack animals or as decoys for hunting wild reindeer; some were also milked. According to the currently held view, it was not until the sixteenth century that nomadism based on large-scale reindeer herding began to develop among the Sami in higher areas. The Sami population of the Norwegian coast in Finnmark fished in the open sea, in addition to hunting seal and walrus as their main food sources. Towards the end of the Viking Age and in the early Middle Ages the coastal Sami of Norway began to engage in animal husbandry on a small scale by keeping sheep and goats and small numbers of cattle. They established a more permanent pattern of settlement than other Sami groups.

A system of interaction between the Sami and the sedentary population must have emerged during prehistoric times; it developed into a relationship in which the Sami were dependent on the sedentary population. It has, however, been suggested that contacts between the two groups were mostly symbiotic: the sedentary Scandinavians obtained furs and hides to sell while the Sami received useful articles, mainly iron tools and kettles (having discontinued their own production of iron and pottery before c. 300 BC).⁴⁰ From the late Viking Age written sources point to these relations, beginning with the well-known account of the north Norwegian chieftain Ohthere (Ottar) towards the end of the ninth century (cf. Chapter 6). His main source of income was the tax (ON *finn-skattr*) placed on furs, hides and other hunting products from the dependent Sami. The chief goal of taxing the Sami and trading with them was to obtain furs. Both the Sami trade and taxation, at first carried out by local chieftains such as Ottar, were later taken over by the Norwegian crown.

Norse trading activities in the northern regions extended as far as the land of the Finnic-speaking *bjarmar* (ON, *beormas* in OE) on the White Sea. These contacts, which continued until the early thirteenth century, were first maintained by land and, from the latter half of the Viking Age, by sea.

40 J.-P. Taavitsainen, 'Kaskeaminen ja metsästys erämailla', *Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, 73 (1994), pp. 194–7; Carpelan, 'Samerna', in M. Norrback (ed.), *Finlands historia*, 1 (Ekenäs, 1993), pp. 178–80.

Following the same pattern as the Norwegians, the agrarian population of northern Sweden and Finland established contacts with the Sami in the adjoining forest and mountain areas. The most prominent of these Lapland-traders were those who lived on the coast and in the lower river valleys between the rivers Piteå and Kemi north of the Gulf of Bothnia. Inhabitants of more southerly parts of Finland, too, had interests in these activities. At the close of the fourteenth century there is evidence that inhabitants of the province of Satakunta, about 500 km to the south, sold their Sami contacts to traders living permanently in the northern regions.

No chieftains of the same standing as those of northern Norway are known from the Swedish and Finnish regions. However, medieval and early modern written evidence and evidence from excavations of farm sites show that the journeys to Lapland, involving trade, taxation and other forms of exploitation of the Sami, were the basis for considerable accumulation of wealth and power in society. Archaeological finds show that the Nordic rural communities around the Gulf of Bothnia also maintained commercial contacts with central Europe. The Lapland-traders from that region were mostly Finnish-speaking, and were referred to in Norse-Icelandic sources as *kvenir*, in the Old English account of Ottar as *cwenas*. From the beginning of the fourteenth century they appear as a distinct group, called *birkarlar* in Swedish, who, protected and supported by the Swedish crown, exacted tribute from the Sami and traded with them.⁴¹

Efforts to gain access to and control of the fur resources of northern and north-eastern Scandinavia and Finland led to confrontations between the Norwegians and the *kvenir/birkarlar* of the Swedish realm and also with the Karelians. From the twelfth century the latter extended their activities from the shores of Lake Ladoga to these northern regions. The expeditions of the Karelians were facilitated by water routes, and in winter thick snow cover and frozen lakes and rivers permitted travel on skis. The competition for the resources of the far north is clearly reflected in the peace treaties of Novgorod with Sweden in 1323 and with Norway in 1326.

Rural society

Changes in settlement structure

Different patterns of settlement have existed in the Nordic countries from prehistoric times. On the one hand, there were farms grouped in villages

⁴¹ Wallerström, *Norrbottnen, Sverige och medeltiden* (n. 14), pp. 239–66.

or hamlets of different sizes whose resource areas were more or less clearly separated from each other. Within each area the farms used the resources partly on an individual basis, partly in common. On the other hand, there were individual, separate farms corresponding both functionally and legally to villages in the sense that they had their own resource territories.

In terms of agrarian settlement Scandinavia has been divided into two main areas ever since the Middle Ages. In the southern and eastern parts – Denmark, Sweden, and Finland – villages and hamlets predominated, though there were also areas where separate farms were the main form of settlement. To the west, Norway and western parts of Sweden, Iceland, Greenland, Føroyar, Shetland and Orkney formed a region where settlement mostly consisted of individual farms. Generally, separate farms predominated in regions where cultivable soils were scarce and were distributed in patches over wide areas while villages and hamlets emerged in regions with tillable flat land and wide valleys. It should, however, be noted that the latter conditions also exist to some extent in parts of the west Nordic region characterised by separate farms, notably in Østlandet and Trøndelag in Norway.

Between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries societal development and the introduction of new systems of cultivation led to changes in the structures of settlement, particularly within the southern and eastern region, which affected the physical shape and organisation of villages and hamlets as well as the ways their territories, particularly the infields, were used. New developments occurred in several places but no clear chronological pattern has so far been discerned.

Medieval changes in settlement structure were previously seen, particularly in Sweden, as being caused from above – by the regulations of an emerging state, the self-interests of magnates, and the efforts of the church. Archaeological and human-geographical studies in recent decades have, however, altered opinions on the dynamics of change in the Nordic agrarian communities from the late Iron Age. The views of the Swedish human geographer Ulf Sporrøng can be regarded as representative in this respect. According to Sporrøng, the efforts of the farming population to make optimum use of natural resources, notably arable soil, were a key factor in changing the way fields and outfields were used and village centres were shaped. At the same time social values and conventions, such as rules of inheritance and the acquisition and ownership of land, influenced the local communities' acceptance of new solutions. According to this interpretation changes were initiated within agrarian society and implemented in the individual villages only when they were regarded as useful or necessary. This does not mean, however, that they were not influenced by

the various demands of the emerging states for new forms of taxation and other burdens, which made it desirable to assess dues justly in proportion to the economic capacity of each farm.

In contrast to previous assumptions, the restructuring processes characteristic of the high medieval Nordic village and hamlet region now appear to have continued in the late Middle Ages. The ideas and the necessary knowledge of methods by which problems could be solved in agrarian society are regarded by Sporrøng as being widespread and known not only in central and western Europe but also in Scandinavia.⁴²

Village settlement structure and field systems

In Denmark (including Skåne) villages were the predominant type of medieval settlement. It was there, in the most densely populated parts of Scandinavia, that the largest villages were found, consisting of up to thirty or forty farms and exceptionally even more. However, the average village was considerably smaller, comprising possibly some ten farms, though villages of double that size were by no means rare. There were also small hamlets and separate farms, but these were mainly late creations.

The medieval Danish village structure was in many ways unstable. New villages were not only the result of the expansion of settlement into forested areas but also of the above-mentioned relocations of farms in the peripheries of the earlier village centres. Concentration of two or more existing villages at a single site (German *Ballung*) also occurred. These restructurings appear to have been prompted by efforts to make optimum use of village resources.

Throughout the first millennium AD Danish agrarian society was marked by the continual relocation of rural villages and hamlets, for which the term 'migrating rural village' has been coined. We have seen that villages were repeatedly moved, at intervals of some 100–150 years, to new sites within the village territory in order to achieve optimum utilisation of the fields under the prevailing system of continuous cropping. Apparently, the shift to crop rotation put an end to the migration of villages, probably mainly in the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but in certain parts of the Danish kingdom, for instance in Falster, relocation of villages did not end until the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁴³

In connection with crop rotation an open-field system was introduced in which the village infields were divided into two or three enclosed fields within

42 Sporrøng, *Målarbygd*, pp. 191–7.

43 Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 226–31; Pedersen, 'Gammelbyernes fortolkning', pp. 171–3.

which each farm had its share in the form of numerous and evenly distributed strips. The strips were parcelled and distributed according to somewhat varying principles. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was a system of parcelling according to *bol* units (Danish *bolskifte*) (cf. Chapter 8(b)). But there was also the younger 'sunwise' parcelling system (*solskifte*) of the thirteenth century and later which often replaced the *bolskifte* (see Figure 6). These systems were similar to the British open-field system; the east Danish and the English Midland systems in particular show a close resemblance. However, no direct links between the Danish and British systems have been demonstrated.⁴⁴

In the Scandinavian open-field systems each farm cultivated a large number of narrow strips, sometimes up to several dozen, in the village fields. The width of the strips was determined by each farm's relative share in the economic resources of the village, the measuring instruments being ropes or rods. The procedure started from a corner of the open field, allotting a strip of the appropriate width to each farm, and was then repeated until all the arable land within the open field had been distributed. Depending on the size of the shares of the individual farms, the units of measurement and the dimensions of the fields, the strips varied in width from a few metres to a few dozen metres, and they could be up to a few hundred metres long. These long and narrow strips were well suited to being worked with medieval ards and ploughs.⁴⁵

The *bolskifte* system allotted strips to the farms in hierarchical order. According to this system the farms were clustered in fixed groups, each group apparently corresponding to an ordinary farm (*bol*) in the early Middle Ages, many of which were divided into two or more farms in the course of time. The *bol* units were regarded as equal in terms of economic resources as well as the amount of rents and taxes levied on them. Consequently, they were allotted equally wide plots which were then divided among the farms in relation to their respective share in the *bol*.

The *solskifte* system involved a set order by which each farm was allotted strips in accordance with its proportion of the village's resources and assets, expressed in different units. The order of allotment normally followed the location of farms in the village site proceeding from east to west and from south to north, i.e. in accordance with the apparent route of the sun through the heavens (cf. Danish and Swedish *sol* – sun).

44 Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 266–71, 356–9; Frandsen, *Vang og tægt*, pp. 257–60.

45 Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 270–1; B. Windelhed, *Barknåre by: Markanvändning och bebyggelse i en uppländsk by under tusen år* (Kulturgeografiska Institutionen, Stockholms universitet: Meddelanden. B 92, Stockholm, 1995), pp. 86–9; E. Jutikkala, *Bonden i Finland genom tiderna* (Helsingfors, 1963), pp. 76–87.

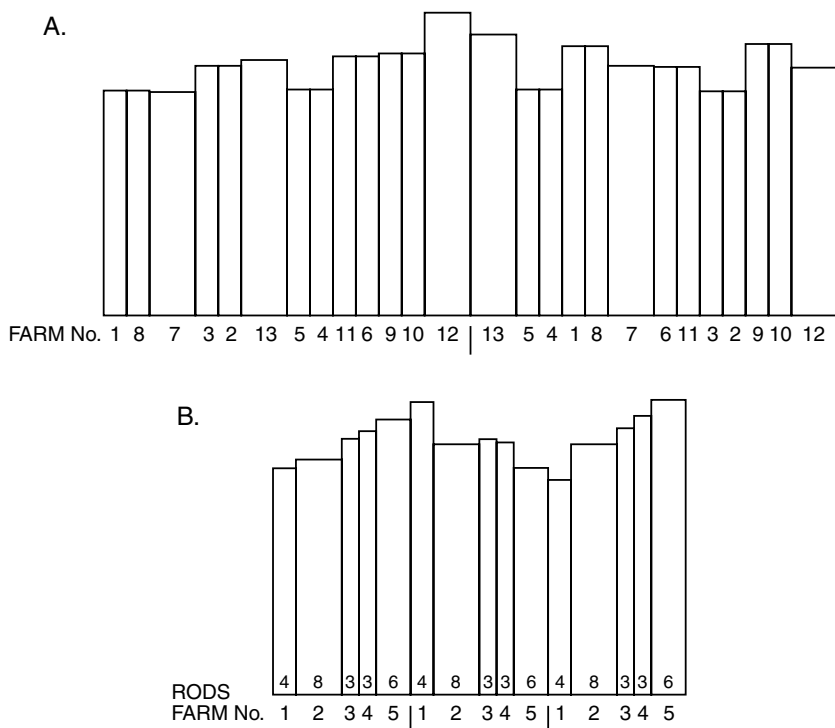


Figure 6 Schematic examples of systematic parcelling of open fields.

A. Parcelling according to bol units (*bolskifte*) The village represented here consisted of eight high medieval *bol* units, at some time subdivided into thirteen farms (nos. 1–13). Farms 7, 12, 13 represented original undivided *bol* units. Each of the other *bol* units were subdivided into two so that farms 1 and 8, 2 and 3, 4 and 5, 6 and 11, 9 and 10, always appeared together in the open fields of the village. The figure shows two allotment sequences where each *bol* has been given plots of the same width, shared by two farms in each of the subdivided units. The order of the *bol*-plots in each sequence was not fixed, and the length of the plots and subdivided strips varied according to the terrain. A shorter strip or plot in one sequence would be compensated for in another.

B. Parcelling according to the sunwise system (*solskifte*) The hamlet represented here consisted of five farms which possessed varying numbers of the twenty-four shares into which the resources of the hamlet were subdivided: farm 1: four shares, farm 2: eight shares, farms 3 and 4: three shares each, farm 5: six shares. A rod or rope was used as an allotment tool, often six ells or c. 3.60 m long. When an open field was allotted, the procedure normally began from the northern or eastern corner of the field. In this case, farm 1 would get a strip four rods wide, farm 2 a strip eight rods wide, and so on. When the last farm, no. 5, had got its strip of six rods, the allotment sequence was completed with a total width of c. 86 m. The procedure was then repeated in the same order until the whole of the open field was allotted, in this case in three sequences. Here, as in the *bolskifte* system, the length of the strips would vary according to the terrain and shorter strips in one sequence would be compensated for in another.

Bolskifte and *solskifte* were the main systems of parcelling out open fields, but there were also other variants and intermediary forms as well as open fields that were not systematically arranged. In addition, the arable land allocated to a farm could be divided into new strips when the farm was divided into smaller holdings, for example between heirs.

The farm plots (farmhouse with farmyard) were themselves quite often systematically regulated, notably in villages following the sunwise system. Such regulations had occurred in Denmark since the Viking Age as demonstrated by archaeological excavations of villages such as that at Vorbasse in Jylland.⁴⁶ In Denmark throughout the Middle Ages and even later, the layout of many villages was regulated, with each farm being given uniform plots. This was often done by noble landowners who owned whole villages. Models were also sought from abroad. In the northern parts of the island of Falster a number of villages had regulated plots corresponding to those found in the regions of northern Germany and Poland colonised by Germans in the high Middle Ages. These arrangements in Falster have been seen to be connected with the resettlement and recultivation of previously abandoned villages in the late Middle Ages.⁴⁷

The predominant type of settlement in Sweden was a small hamlet of three to five farms, although considerably larger villages also existed from the Middle Ages. As in Denmark the adoption of crop rotation, i.e. two-course cultivation, led to structural change in the villages and hamlets of the central agricultural regions around Lake Mälaren and in Östergötland. The cultivated areas of the villages and hamlets began to be reorganised into open fields that were divided according to the principles of the *solskifte* system. Since this system was prescribed in the thirteenth-century provincial laws of central Sweden, its adoption has been regarded as a relatively fast process carried out by the state. Recent field work, particularly by Bengt Windelhed, has, however, shown that the adoption of the *solskifte* system was a lengthy process, extending from the Viking Age to the late Middle Ages, that was determined by the needs of each community.⁴⁸

The southern and western parts of the Swedish kingdom contained large areas with predominantly separate farms, although partition could result in

46 Porsmose, 'Den senmiddelalderlige krise – i Vorbasse', in Ingesman and Jensen (eds.), *Danmark i senmiddelalderen*, p. 44. Cf. p. 127, Figure 2.

47 Frandsen, 'Landskifte og landsbyformer på Falster', in Gissel (ed.), *Falsterundersøgelsen*, pp. 274–1.

48 Sporrøng, *Mälabygd*, pp. 163–4; Windelhed, *Barknåre by*, pp. 272–82.

units with several holdings. The South Swedish Highlands with their stony moraine soils comprised such an area; the western parts of the kingdom bordering on Norway also had a preponderance of individual farms practising the same infield-outfield system as in Norway, with the fields and meadows of each farm within a single enclosure.

The adoption of the *solskifte* system in central Sweden occasionally also gave rise to a major restructuring of the settlement pattern, with small hamlets or individual farms being concentrated in one of the farm or hamlet sites (*Ballung*), the result being a settlement with numerous farms. In such cases, but also where no such changes took place, the villages were systematically regulated so that the size of each farm curtilage corresponded to the relative size of the farm. Such regulation was, however, still quite rare in the high Middle Ages.

Medieval settlement in the areas of arable farming in south and south-west Finland had a similar character to that in central Sweden. As a rule, hamlets of a few farms predominated but small villages and individual farms were not uncommon. In these areas, where two-course rotation was practised, the open-field system with parcelling of fields into strips was being practised by the beginning of the fourteenth century. In the cultivated inland areas, however, conversion to the open-field system was still in progress at the end of the Middle Ages.

In the eastern slash-and-burn region, broadly speaking the areas east of Lake Päijänne, settlement was less stable and more heterogeneous than in the areas of arable farming. Individual farms or small hamlets were situated perhaps tens of kilometres apart. In the Middle Ages there also emerged villages which were very loosely structured – they were made up of large numbers of farms, as many as several dozen, spread at short distances from each other and often within a total radius of several kilometres. The medieval east Finnish villages and hamlets lacked fixed territories since the right to utilise slash-and-burn plots, which were still readily available, was based on the seizure of the land in question for a limited period.

The west Nordic region of separate farms

Throughout the whole of the west Nordic region farms with their own names and their own territories were the basic medieval unit of settlement. In Norway we have seen that the expansion of settlement led not only to the emergence of new farms but also to a situation in which the primary named farms (Norw. *navnegårder* – farms with their own names) were frequently split into two or

more holdings (Norw. *bruk*), that is, units of production occupied by a medieval household, normally a family.

In Vestlandet, where arable land was most limited, the process of dividing named farms into holdings was taken to its furthest extent. Since the holdings of such a farm remained on the same settlement site, it came, externally, to resemble a hamlet or even a village. In other parts of Norway, including the later Swedish provinces of Jämtland and Härjedalen, subdivision of farms was not as extensive. Overall, such subdivisions were limited; average numbers of holdings on named farms was apparently between 1.4 and 1.9, only rising exceptionally to 2.0–2.5 in some districts.⁴⁹ There was a similar development in Iceland, where later subdivision of the farms of the colonisation period created several holdings, each with its own home fields, while the outlying land was used collectively by all of them.

In the Norwegian holdings medieval land-use was marked by an infield-outfield system whereby the infields of each holding formed a single enclosed area where only a small part of the land was cultivated and the rest used as natural meadow. If two holdings were so close to each other that their infields shared a common border, these could form a single enclosure, thus minimising the labour of fencing. In Vestlandet the fields of heavily subdivided named farms were often parcelled into narrow strips, thus resembling the field systems of southern and eastern Scandinavia, while the outfields were used in common.⁵⁰

Throughout Scandinavia the fields, whether open or separately fenced, were normally tilled individually by the holdings, while the outlying land – meadows, pastures, forests, hunting fields, and fishing waters – was usually used collectively. However, the open-field system greatly limited the freedom of the individual farmer; he was bound by the demands for simultaneous execution of various tasks within the joint fenced-in areas.

We have seen that organisation of settlement and the allocation and use of land could vary from region to region. There could also be significant differences within regions, since the needs for internal organisation differed between central areas and the periphery. The latter tended to have simpler structures while settlement in the central areas was denser and the land use more complex. Consequently, the pace of change differed; in central districts complex solutions were introduced when the need for restructuring arose,

49 J. Sandnes and H. Salvesen, *Ødegårdstid i Norge: Det nordiske ødegårdsprosjekts norske undersøkelser* (Det nordiske ødegårdsprosjekt, Publikasjoner, 4, Oslo, 1978), pp. 55–63.

50 Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt*, p. 108.

while older and simpler structures survived longer in the periphery. The same was the case with outmoded implement types.⁵¹

Ownership and tenure of land

Medieval conditions of land tenure in Scandinavia differed markedly from those of central and western Europe. Feudal concepts of tenure applied only to a limited degree in this peripheral part of Europe. Rather, pre-feudal, allodial concepts predominated, allowing large land-owners as well as ordinary freeholders to freely dispose of their land; landed property could be inherited, sold, and also – within certain limits – bequeathed.

At the same time land was regarded to some extent as a family or kin possession, evident in the fact that kin in a legally determined order were entitled to first refusal on the sale of inherited land, a counterpart to the *laudatio parentum* (the approbation of relatives) in west European societies. Land sold to non-kin without having been offered to the legal heirs could be redeemed according to rules prescribed in the oldest law-codes.

Feudal notions were not, however, completely absent; they made themselves felt, for instance, when Danish kings claimed that episcopal estates were royal fiefs, a claim that was disputed by the representatives of the church. The forms by which local notables held church property in Iceland also reflect feudal concepts (see Chapter 8(d)).

The inheritance principles in force in medieval Scandinavia have traditionally been regarded as going back to prehistoric times. Recent studies, however, show that significant changes occurred in the Middle Ages, particularly in Norway. There was originally a difference between east and west. The regulations of Danish and east Swedish provincial laws follow the principles of cognatic, bilateral inheritance and permit the dispersion of property, whereas the west Nordic laws – those of western Sweden, Norway and Iceland – show a bilateral system that limited the dispersion of land by giving preference to male descendants. However, the Norwegian national Landlaw of 1274 gave inheritance rights in the first instance to both sons and daughters, even if it, too, favoured male heirs to some degree. The Norwegian historian Lars Ivar Hansen regards the inheritance principles as reflecting the aristocracy's strategies for social reproduction. By preferring male descendants the old aristocracy in Norway, as in many other west European communities, strove in

⁵¹ Sporrøng, *Målarbygd*, pp. 191–9; U. Sporrøng, 'Det äldre agrarlandskapet före 1750', in S. Helmfrid (ed.), *Kulturlandskapet och bebyggelsen* (Sveriges Nationalatlas, Italy, 1994), pp. 30–2; Windelhed, *Barknåre by*, pp. 51–9.

the eleventh and twelfth centuries to maintain its position under the threat of growing royal authority. The regulations of the Landlaw reflect the increased royal and ecclesiastical domination of society towards the end of the high Middle Ages.

In the central regions of Scandinavia, where the economy was predominantly based on arable farming, inheritance among both freeholders and privileged had the aim of keeping the production units intact, so that obstacles were put up to prevent the subdivision of farms and larger complexes of landed property; this has been regarded as a feudal feature. In areas where arable farming was subordinate to animal husbandry and other activities, such as exploiting the resources of outlying areas, the situation was different. There, landed property was often subdivided among all the heirs according to the so-called partible inheritance principle. This was at least partly due to the fact that full social standing called for ownership of land, however small in extent. The partible inheritance principle was generally applied in the west Nordic region, in certain marginal areas of the Swedish kingdom such as Dalarna, and presumably in less extreme forms in some parts of Finland, notably in the south-western archipelago regions.⁵²

The allodial nature of land ownership did not mean that the nobility and freeholders possessed land on equal terms. One of the results of the development of military technology was that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Crown in all the Scandinavian kingdoms strove to convert the contributions of farmers to the naval levy into permanent taxation of land, and in Denmark and Sweden also to establish heavily armed cavalry units. Here, magnates of the old aristocracy and smaller landowners who took upon themselves service on horseback, were exempted, together with their tenants, from permanent taxes on land. In Norway, a much more limited tax exemption, including only one or two retainers, was given to the members of the royal *hirð* who served on foot and in the fleet (see Chapters 8(b)–8(d)). In this way a privileged noble class emerged in all three kingdoms towards the end of the thirteenth century. The nobility's possession of land and its privileged position in relation to ordinary freeholders was thus not of a feudal character; tax-exemption was rather a privilege granted in return for military service.

52 U. Sporrang and E. Wennersten, *Marken, gården, släkten och arvet* (Solna, 1995), pp. 332–6; L. I. Hansen, 'Slektskap, eiendom og sosiale strategier i nordisk middelalder', *Collegium Medievale*, 7 (1994), pp. 134–45; B. and P. Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation (The Nordic Series, 17)*, Minneapolis, 1993), pp. 166–9, 180–9; A. C. Murray, *Germanic Kinship Structure: Studies in Law and Society in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (Studies and Texts. Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 65)*, Toronto, 1983), pp. 221–4.

Rights over land and the forms of utilising landed property were crucial determinants of social and economic status in agrarian society. Only in Norway is it possible to estimate roughly the high medieval distribution of land among various categories of owners on the basis of the taxed values of farms and holdings. In the first half of the fourteenth century ecclesiastical institutions appear to have owned about 40 per cent of the land in present-day Norway according to value, the nobility about 20 per cent, and the Crown about 7 per cent, while the remaining 33 per cent belonged to freeholders. There were, however, considerable regional differences. The great landowners dominated the best and most centrally placed agricultural districts, particularly those surrounding the more important towns, while freeholders were most numerous in remoter districts with less favourable conditions for arable farming.

In Denmark the proportion of farms owned by freeholders in the mid-thirteenth century has been estimated at around one-quarter, while the Crown held about 5 per cent. Land owned by the nobility and the church thus amounted to considerably more than half of all holdings in the country. In the high medieval Swedish kingdom it is not possible to estimate the distribution of landed property among various categories of owners, but later information clearly suggests that more than half of all farms were owned by freeholders. In the central farming regions, and also in certain more peripheral southern parts of the kingdom, the nobility and the church were prominent landowners, while freeholders were completely predominant in the northern and eastern parts of the realm, in Norrland and throughout Finland.

Land and social structure

The allodial nature of land ownership was one major difference between Scandinavian and west European communities in the high Middle Ages. Another was that the whole agrarian population, with the exception of slaves or thralls, were personally free both legally and in practice, freeholders as well as tenants and even landless groups.

The overwhelming majority of the population were people who supported themselves directly by farming; most heads of families and households were either freeholders or tenants. Neither freeholders nor tenants represented distinct or homogeneous social strata. Throughout Scandinavia there were considerable economic differences within both categories. The tenants of large holdings could be in a considerably better economic position than the freeholders of small holdings. In many parts of Scandinavia societal development

in the early and high Middle Ages led to changes in the living conditions of both freeholders and tenants. Generally, these changes tended to be negative from the perspective of the farmers themselves.

The Scandinavian tenant farmer of the high Middle Ages had a legally free position in relation to his landlord, which is shown by the fact that the leases of tenant holdings were based on mutually binding agreements. The duration of the leases varied considerably. Danish laws stipulated the period of rent as only one year, which is also mentioned as a (minimum?) period in western Norwegian and later Icelandic laws, but in practice the period was considerably longer. Norwegian lease contracts included leases for a lifetime and occasionally even hereditary rights to lease land, and it appears that time-based leases were often for three years. Swedish laws laid down lease periods from six to eight years. The relatively independent status of the tenants is shown by the fact that in Denmark and Sweden it was customary for them to own not only the livestock and farming implements but also the houses and buildings on the holdings which they cultivated. Nor was it uncommon for well-to-do tenants to own freehold land which they farmed or rented to others.⁵³

Opinions on the emergence of land tenancy in Scandinavia have changed considerably over the years. According to a time-honoured view, free, land-owning farmers were the dominant group in the Viking Age and at the beginning of the Middle Ages, although there were also those who farmed holdings owned by rich farmers and magnates. The adherents of this view hold that it was not until the high Middle Ages that the tenant group came to form the majority of the farming population of Denmark, Norway and Iceland.

However, recent research in both Denmark and Norway indicates that Iron Age society was marked by considerable and growing inequality, both economically and socially. There were chiefs and magnates who owned or controlled extensive complexes of land farmed by thralls, freedmen and free men who were dependent on the landowners in varying degrees or were in a client relationship with them. The large number of tenant farmers in Denmark, Norway and Iceland towards the end of the high Middle Ages is now being regarded as a result of a long-term process with roots in the early Iron Age and continuing in the early and high Middle Ages.

⁵³ T. Lindkvist, *Landborna i Norden under äldre medeltid* (*Studia historica Upsaliensia*, 110, Uppsala, 1979), pp. 87–93; Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 257, 261–3; Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt*, pp. 110–14.

Medieval tenant farms were established on land belonging to leading figures in society when it was cleared by thralls and freedmen, or by the splitting up and renting out of estates that had earlier been farmed on a large scale by the owners themselves. For a number of reasons freehold farms also passed into the ownership of the lay aristocracy, the Church and the Crown, to be rented out to tenants. In Norway, these reasons included the confiscation of the lands of the losing side in the numerous struggles connected with the political unification of the country, and the taking over of former common land by the Crown so that colonists there became royal tenants. In Denmark historians have underlined the need of farmers for physical and judicial protection in times of unrest. For this reason freeholders transferred their land to magnates and ecclesiastical institutions to become their tenants, thus also obtaining exemption from regular royal taxation.⁵⁴

From the high Middle Ages the development of agrarian society in Denmark was marked by the dominant land-owning position of the nobility, especially the high nobility, and the Church, in particular the episcopal sees and monasteries. As early as the Iron Age Danish villages and hamlets have been shown by archaeological research to have included large farming units alongside family farms. As the manorial complexes appear in twelfth-century sources they were managed by stewards (Danish *bryde*, German *Meier*, Lat. *villicus*) on behalf of or in partnership with the owner. A special category of large-scale farming were the granges of the Cistercian order. From the 1180s, according to Nils Hybel, the ecclesiastical landowners started to farm out the manors, followed by their secular counterparts certainly not later than the early fourteenth century. The land was left to be completely worked by the *villici*, who thereby became the leaseholders of large farming units with a status resembling that of tenants. This reorganisation of large-scale farming followed the practice of west European landlords who from the twelfth century began to farm out the demesnes.

As more light falls upon the composite holdings of the great landowners in the course of the thirteenth century they are seen to consist of demesnes (*mansio, curia*) with subordinate tenant farms (*colonia*) and cottagers (Danish *gårdsæder*, sing. *gårdsæde*, Lat. *inquilinus*). Erik Ulsig has demonstrated that the holdings farmed by the *villici* comprised much larger areas (roughly 15–65

54 Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt*, pp. 119–21; K. Hørby, 'Middelalderen', in N. Lund and K. Hørby, *Samfundet i vikingetid og middelalder 800–1500* (Dansk socialhistorie, 2, København, 1980), pp. 52–4; Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 343–6; T. Iversen, *Trelldommen: Norsk slaveri i middelalderen* (Historisk institutt, Universitetet i Bergen, Skrifter, 1, Bergen, 1997), pp. 235–40, 255–9, 260–7; Lindkvist, *Landborna*, pp. 129–49.

hectares of cultivated land) than those of tenant farmers of the early fourteenth century who generally worked small production units of only 5–6 hectares. The *villici* paid rent to the landlord either in the form of share-cropping or by a fixed rent notably in grain. The ordinary tenants (Danish *landboer*, sing. *landbo*) paid small fees and performed between four and eight boon days annually for the *villicus*. The *inquilini* had only very small plots of land which could not feed a family, as their main function was to provide labour. They performed around twenty days of labour service for the manor and were engaged in paid labour as well.⁵⁵

The Danish freeholders of the early and high Middle Ages did not constitute a homogeneous group. Their economic conditions varied greatly, with some freeholders owning several tenanted farms. It was possible to rise from this group to the lower orders of nobility by providing mounted service for the Crown. On the other hand, many of the lower nobility descended to the freeholder class when they could no longer provide the required mounted service. Over the years, taxes levied by the Crown on freehold farms became heavier and continuously eroded the economic basis of the owners. One result was that large numbers of freeholders became the tenants of privileged landowners by selling their land to them.

In high medieval Norway several factors worked to lower the position of the farming population. The population growth described above (Chapter 9) led to a scarcity of arable land, and soils of increasingly poor fertility were taken into cultivation. This in turn resulted in a large number of small farms and holdings of weak productive capacity. The rent paid by freeholders to landlords around 1300 has been estimated at about one-fifth of gross production in western Norway and about one-sixth in other parts of the country.

The situation of farmers, freeholders and tenants also varied greatly in Norway. Alongside freeholders with small farming units there were those who owned several holdings or shares in them and received rent from those who farmed the land. On the other hand, there was also a lower stratum of more or less landless cottagers. From the late thirteenth century all farms and holdings were valued according to the real or potential land rent that could be derived from them. Joint ownership to a holding was arranged without splitting up the farming; there was still only one farmer who paid land rent

55 E. Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser i middelalderen* (København, 1968), pp. 117–35, 203–12; E. Ulsig, 'Landboerne i Skæring: En retropektiv analyse', in H. Ilssøe and B. Jørgensen (eds.), *Plov og pen: Festskrift til Svend Gissel* (København, 1991), pp. 223–36; E. Ulsig, 'Højmiddelalderens danske godssystem set i europæisk sammenhæng', *Bol og by* (*Landbohøistorsk Tidsskrift*, 2, 1996), pp. 8–26; N. Hybel, 'The creation of large-scale production in Denmark', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 20 (1995), pp. 264–80.

to other owners according to the size of their shares. This opened the way for widespread part-ownership, which became a characteristic feature of the Norwegian tenant system. A farmer could be a pure freeholder or tenant, but he would frequently also own a part of the holding he worked and pay rent for other parts. This kind of ownership pattern came about not least through the rules of inheritance and the transfer of landed property as a consequence of marriage settlements, as well as by way of donations to the Church, the payment of arrears of taxes and fines, the pledging or selling of land, and other transactions. This would contribute to the growth of land in tenancy, but as part-ownership grew more common it also tended to blur the distinction between freeholders and tenants. At any rate, the size and quality of a farmer's holding would often be more decisive for his standing in rural society than his position as freeholder or tenant.

Unlike Denmark, or even Sweden, no manorial system with large-scale farming ever developed on the large complexes of landed property in Norway, even though the residential farms of the aristocracy could be much larger than average and have very sizable households. There is documentary evidence that a west Norwegian farm of this type could in the first half of the fourteenth century have livestock totalling 150 head of oxen, cows and calves as well as a dozen horses, sheep, goats and other domestic animals.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the large complexes of landed property in Norway were scattered, consisting almost solely of tenanted farms and holdings, and even parts of holdings, providing rent for landlords. They could have, but often lacked, a distinct centre in the form of a larger property run on the owner's account. As Norwegian tenant farmers did not normally owe labour service, such central farms, often the seats of their owners, were worked by servants and paid labour.

Icelandic society had originally emerged as an offshoot of Norwegian society, but during a span of only a century or so had become distanced from it in many respects. Unlike the three Nordic kingdoms a strong central authority and a privileged nobility never emerged in medieval Iceland (see Chapter 8(d)). Society was dominated by a stratum of magnates whose position was, on the one hand, based on the function of chieftains (*goðar*) and, on the other hand, on the size of the landed property owned or controlled by them. The large landed properties consisted of one or more main farms, often used as residences by the landlords, and subordinate tenant farms. In terms of economic resources the main farms corresponded to at least three ordinary freeholds.

⁵⁶ Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt*, p. 99.

Livestock was the main productive resource on the Icelandic farms. The large residential farms had around 20–40 milking cows and other cattle that could have a higher value than the cows, as well as several hundred head of sheep and a few dozen horses.

The possession of land by the local chieftains in Iceland was only partly of allodial character. The original proprietary church system gave way to a system by which many churches and the farms on which they were built became joint ecclesiastical institutions (*staðir*) whose economy was administered by the donors and their successors in forms similar to those laid down in the feudal laws of western and central Europe (Chapter 8(d)). This could be a very lucrative privilege, transforming a number of leading families into what may be termed ‘ecclesiastical magnate’ families.

As early as the high Middle Ages the majority of the Icelandic population consisted of tenants on holdings belonging to ecclesiastical institutions, magnates and rich freeholders. The maximum annual land rent paid in Iceland was 10 per cent of the taxed value of the farm. A practice which became common in the late Middle Ages was to stock the tenant farms with the livestock of the landlord who levied a payment for this; this is also known from the other Nordic countries. At the beginning of the thirteenth century a new type of agrarian household, the *hjáleiga*, a kind of croft, had started to appear on the lands of the farms (*lögibili*). These had small infields and herds of livestock of their own but they remained part of the farms on which they had been established and were held by peasants who may have been freed thralls and who provided extra labour for the other farmers.

Much less is known about social conditions in the high medieval Swedish kingdom than in Denmark, Norway or Iceland, as there are extremely few documents before the mid-fourteenth century. The provincial law-redactions of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries have their normative rules but there is hardly any detailed information on the actual development of the economic conditions of either the aristocracy or the farming population.

Both in Sweden and Finland there were throughout the Middle Ages large uninhabited areas suited to rural settlement in most of the provinces; even though the more fertile soils had already come under cultivation there was room for expansion. Consequently, the growth of population did not generally lead to the deterioration of the living conditions of the rural population that has been noted in Denmark and Norway until the end of the high Middle Ages, possibly with exceptions in the central rural regions. Almost exclusively the new settlements that emerged in the northern areas of Sweden and in

Finland became freehold farms, in spite of the Crown's claim to uncolonised areas from the first half of the fourteenth century and the ambitious colonisation schemes of leading secular and ecclesiastical protagonists in northern Sweden along the Gulf of Bothnia at the beginning of the same century. The situation was different, however, in the southern parts of the kingdom – in Östergötland, Västergötland and Småland – where the uncolonised areas were considerably smaller. There, freeholder colonists in the outlying areas had to compete with the nobility, ecclesiastical institutions, including a few Cistercian monasteries, as well as the Crown which claimed parts of the uncolonised commons. Numerous new farms came thus to belong to large landowners.

In the high Middle Ages much land in Sweden belonged to the local aristocracy from which the high nobility of Sweden descended, or was owned by ecclesiastical institutions or the Crown. The exact size of the estates belonging to the upper strata is not known. They appear to have consisted mostly of tenant farms paying rent, but there were also minor manors worked on a large scale as in Denmark. Such manors and tenant farms were commonly located in villages or hamlets where there were also freeholders, and in these cases the manors were worked within the framework of the village or hamlet community.

Until recently it was generally thought that Swedish high medieval manors were smaller than their Danish counterparts, but Sigurd Rahmqvist has shown that the manors of magnates in the central provinces of the Mälars area were much larger than earlier supposed. In the first half of the fourteenth century manor centres were transferred from old villages to more peripheral locations where their lands were separated from those of the villages. Such manors were often fortified and they were farmed on a large scale. There are also indications of a corresponding manor system in other parts of Sweden, in many respects similar to the situation in Denmark. The lands of quite a few of these manors appear to have been cultivated in two-course rotation and to cover some 24–36 hectares, the size of between four and six ordinary farms.

The farming of the manors was mainly carried out by hired labour and partly by thralls, as well as by contractual labour provided by adjacent tenant farms. From the beginning of the fourteenth century there are indications that major agricultural units were broken down to be rented out as tenant holdings. On the other hand, the tax exemptions which in 1279 were granted to landowners performing mounted service with heavy armour, resulted in

the emergence of numerous smaller, unfortified manors owned by the newly established low nobility.⁵⁷

Gender in rural society

The nature of land ownership and the structure of the economy had a decisive influence on the status of women in the medieval Nordic rural communities. The allodial character of land ownership meant that women of various strata in society, including the freeholder group, could become owners of land, notably by marriage arrangements (dowry and dower) and inheritance. Even though husbands were in control of their spouses' landed property, most Nordic laws required the consent of the wife when her real estate was disposed of.

The legal position of women with respect to inheritance generally improved in the high Middle Ages. By the thirteenth century daughters had become entitled to inheritance even when there were sons in the family, but they inherited only half of what was due to the sons, and male heirs were also favoured in certain other respects. This was partly compensated by marriage arrangements. In such cases husbands had more or less to match the dowry of their wives by a dower (in some places called 'morning gift') and the combination of dowry and dower went a long way towards balancing the economic situation of married brothers and sisters.

In the slash-and-burn areas of eastern Finland inheritance rights differed from those common in other parts of Scandinavia. Here, land as such was of little value; it would gain value only through the input of labour. Since men were responsible for clearing the land only sons were entitled to inherit it. As a rule, the inheritance due to daughters was limited to a cow, a few barrels of grain, and a few other objects.⁵⁸

Among women widows were the most independent, in Scandinavia as elsewhere in Europe; they could continue farming on their own after the death of the spouse and had a greater say than other women in economic transactions and legal disputes. In Norway the provincial laws granted unwed women the right to dispose of their property from the age of fifteen; in the later national legislation of the 1270s the age of majority was raised

57 Andræ, *Kyrka och frälse i Sverige under äldre medeltid* (*Studia historica Upsaliensia*, 4, Uppsala, 1960), pp. 88–98; S. Rahmqvist, *Sätesgård och gods: De medeltida frälsegodsens framväxt mot bakgrund av Upplands bebyggelsehistoria* (*Upplands Fornminnesförenings Tidskrift*, 53, Uppsala, 1996), pp. 14–18, 35–42, 280–302.

58 Jutikkala, *Bonden i Finland*, pp. 60–2.

to twenty years, which also applied in Iceland. Nevertheless, unwed women were in many respects dependent on the male members of their families. Married women, on the other hand, were quite often able to operate with a considerably greater degree of independence than was stipulated by law, for instance when the husband was away on a long journey. Women's seals, which came into use in Scandinavia in the high Middle Ages, and not only those of widows, show that females could have a more active role outside the household.

The question of the general trend in the Scandinavian development of the status of women in the Middle Ages is difficult to answer and consequently disputed. Throughout the high Middle Ages there were tendencies in both directions. In the west Nordic region historians have tended to stress what they consider to be deterioration in certain respects. In the early Middle Ages married women in Norway and Iceland appear to have had the same opportunities as men to divorce but from the late twelfth century their right to divorce was ended in Norway, and in Iceland when Norwegian law was applied there from 1281. This coincided with greater restrictions on the right of married women to control and dispose of their property. These changes were largely due to the growing influence of the Church.

Throughout Scandinavia the agrarian economy was based on a relatively rigorous division of labour between men and women. Generally speaking, in-house activities such as preparation of food, textile work, child care and washing were the domain of women, and so was the care of livestock. On the other hand, outdoor activities such as working the fields and meadows, hunting and fishing were male concerns, though as a rule women participated in the mowing of hay and harvesting, and their particular responsibility for the dairy took them to areas of grazing and the *sætr*. In regions where economic activities in outlying areas were particularly important, be it on land or sea, and required the absence of men from home for long periods, the role of women in farming was generally more prominent. We have seen that this was the case in the fisher-farmer economy of western and northern Norway. In northern Norway and Sweden, and in parts of Finland that were colonised at a late stage, grain was sown by women; in eastern Finland they also took part in the threshing of grain.

In the west Nordic region women also participated in the manufacture of goods for the international market. In Iceland the manufacture of homespun became an important feature of the economy; this was the main export item from the beginning of the thirteenth century until about 1320 and was produced

by female weavers. In Iceland and perhaps elsewhere, oarswomen worked aboard some fishing boats.⁵⁹

Icelandic women have, in the light of saga descriptions, been regarded as having enjoyed greater independence than women in other contemporary European societies; their role in the production of homespun being taken as an indication of this. On the other hand, studies have noted the significant differences in the conditions of women of the Icelandic chieftain class and those of women in other strata of society. The pay and working conditions of women weavers have also been described as less favourable; they were at the bottom of the social scale.⁶⁰

Scandinavian slavery

At the beginning of the Middle Ages there were thralls (slaves) all over Scandinavia. They were largely the property of their owners and could be sold and even killed by the former, but could also be freed. The supply of thralls was organised both internally and externally. With respect to Norway, Tore Iversen has underlined the importance of domestic or internal recruitment; he does not believe in any large-scale import of slaves to the Nordic region, even if this may have been of some importance in the Viking Age when Scandinavians were active as slave-takers and slave-traders abroad.⁶¹ Nordic people could become slaves by being abducted and sold, as a result of falling into debt, and as punishment for crimes. In addition, parents were in pagan times entitled to sell their children as thralls. The main form of internal recruitment was, however, that people were born into slavery as the outcome of thralls' marriages or the sexual exploitation by freemen of slave women; the general rule was that children of female thralls became thralls themselves. Nevertheless, a free father could also convey free status to his children by slave women, and quite a few leading men in Iceland and Norway were the sons of enslaved concubines. Regardless of the importance ascribed to external recruitment of slaves it must have decreased when the Viking raids came to an end in the eleventh century.⁶²

The extent and economic significance of slavery in Nordic societies is hard to assess and highly varying interpretations of the information available in law-texts, narrative sources, and other material have been suggested. Historians

59 Damsholt, 'The role of the Icelandic women', pp. 81–7; Þorláksson, 'Arbeidskvinnens, særlig veverkens økonomiske stilling', pp. 58–9.

60 Ibid., pp. 59–62.

61 Iversen, *Trelldommen*, pp. 110–12.

62 R. M. Karras, *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia* (New Haven and London, 1988), p. 75.

appear, however, to agree that no distinct, plantation-like slave economy ever existed in these societies. To the extent that slave labour was important in the agrarian economy it was used alongside hired workers on the residential farms or manors of local chieftains, magnates and the later nobility, as well as on freehold and tenant farms.

The source material on slavery is most extensive and diverse in Norway and Iceland. In earlier research there was a tendency to play down the extent and significance of the institution of slavery; it was not in keeping with the traditional view that communities consisting mostly of free, land-owning farmers formed the starting point of Norse social history. Since the 1970s, however, the sources have been reinterpreted, partly under the influence of international, comparative slavery research, and the keeping of thralls has come to be regarded as a widespread practice in the households of leading men in Norway and Iceland as also on ordinary farms. The thralls were mainly employed in heavy and less reputable farm and household work but could also hold trusted positions in larger households. This situation is regarded, on the basis of law-texts and sagas, to have been typical of Viking Age Norway and Iceland and to have lasted into the eleventh century, and in Norway also into the twelfth century. In Norway, certain attributes ascribed by sagas and law-texts to the first known royal officials with judicial tasks, the so-called *ármenn* or stewards (cf. Chapter 8(c)), have also been interpreted as indicating an unfree origin like that of the royal *ministeriales* in Germany.

In contrast to Norway and Iceland, Denmark and Sweden largely lack saga evidence for slavery, and the oldest extant law-texts are younger than those of Norway and Iceland. Consequently, the extent and significance of Danish and Swedish slavery is very much an open question. At present the general view seems to be that slave labour on the lands of the early and high medieval Danish manors was not widely used; thralls in Denmark were mostly used in domestic or household work. At the start of the Middle Ages they could, however, be employed both as stewards and as labour on Danish and Swedish manors, but later the stewards were free men. It is quite likely that the agrarian use of slave labour in Denmark and Sweden was in many respects similar to the west Nordic practice.⁶³

From the beginning of the Middle Ages slavery was declining throughout Scandinavia. This was the result of several factors. If there ever had been any significant external recruitment of thralls it must have dried up with

63 Lindkvist, *Landborna*, pp. 67–9, 129–36; Karras, *Slavery*, pp. 80–8; Iversen, *Trelldommen*, 145–9, 167–80.

the decline in Viking expeditions. The establishment of Christianity in the Nordic countries probably contributed to these developments, as the Church condemned the enslavement of Christians and regarded emancipation of slaves as a pious and charitable action, even if it was not in principle against slavery. It also appears that the medieval growth of population made slave labour less profitable in relation to free labour. In recent research this has been put forward as the most important cause of the decline of slavery in Norway. It became more profitable for landowners to rent their land to land-hungry tenants than to work it on their own account with the help of slave labour. Giving slaves the opportunity to purchase their freedom brought their masters more than a once-and-for-all economic bonus; it also relieved them of their legal responsibility for their slaves and the duty to pay tax for them. By giving thralls plots of land to clear and farm so that they could procure the means to purchase their freedom, and by renting such land to freed slaves, landowners could secure and even increase their permanent income and devote themselves to other occupations than farming. At the same time, the freed thralls continued in certain legal respects for a considerable time to be dependent on their former owners. In Sweden, too, freed slaves were given land, often uncleared plots to be cultivated, and the same may have been the case in Denmark.⁶⁴

The decline and ending of slavery in Scandinavia was a process that was drawn out over 200–300 years. In Iceland slavery had already ceased before 1100 and in Norway the end came in the course of the twelfth century. Further east and south slavery survived for a longer period. As late as the first years of the thirteenth century Archbishop Absalon of Lund owned slaves, and in 1206 his successor, Andreas Sunesen, acted as a spokesman for the Danish slave owners. Nevertheless, slavery came to an end in Denmark in the first half of the thirteenth century. In Sweden, however, it continued into the following century. Until 1310 numerous Swedish wills contain instructions on the freeing of slaves, and it was a royal decree issued as late as in 1335 that abolished slavery in the Swedish kingdom.

The Norwegian provincial laws have much to say about the way in which freed slaves (ON *leysingar*, sing. *leysingi*) and their descendants could achieve fully free status. Emancipation would normally be effected by the thrall's payment of a ransom, followed by a feast (ON *frelsisöl*, 'freedom-ale') for his lord or an equivalent payment. The latter contribution would make the freed person a *leysingi* of higher class, less dependent on his former lord; if it was not made it would take the freed person's descendants two (*Gulapingslög*) or

64 Iversen, *Trelldommen*, 267–70; Lindkvist, *Landborna*, pp. 129–39.

four generations (*Frostupingsløg*) to reach the same status. For as many as eight generations the lord and his descendants would have the right to inherit the *leysingi* and his descendants if they left no close relatives.

It was in other words a very drawn-out process to obtain fully free status for the descendants of freed thralls in high medieval Norway. In the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries there would presumably be a significant number of people who were on their way towards full freedom, but who were still controlled to various degrees by the former lords and their descendants. They would probably most often sustain themselves and their families as tenants on smallholdings or earn their living as paid servants or landless labourers. Before they were completely absorbed into the existing lower strata of freemen they would constitute a group that can in certain respects be compared to European serfs or villeins.⁶⁵ Again, one must presume that Norway was not in this respect unique in high medieval Scandinavia.

65 Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt*, pp. 116–17.

II

Urbanisation

HANS ANDERSSON

Few studies of urbanisation have considered Scandinavia as a whole. Research is to a large extent presented in monographs on individual towns, published in the native language. Such presentations vary in age and quality but include works of a very high standard. There are, however, few comparative studies. National surveys were presented and ambitious discussions conducted at the Nordic historical conferences held in Århus in 1957 and Trondheim in 1977.¹ Yet there was no real attempt at inter-Scandinavian comparison, and only occasional examples of this have appeared later.²

Nevertheless, Scandinavia lends itself to a discussion of the causes, expressions and course of urbanisation. Not only does it cover a large area with a great variety of natural conditions; political and cultural conditions, too, could vary considerably. It is also possible to study many of the towns in question in the light of newly excavated archaeological material which is so far little known abroad. In some cases the early sites have not been overlaid by more recent settlements so that their structure is simpler to analyse than is often the case in more densely populated parts of Europe.

There is a long but uneven tradition of urban archaeology in Scandinavia. A trend towards larger investigations started with the great fire at the old wharf of Bryggen in Bergen in 1955, leading to what was then the largest archaeological

1 *Det nordiske syn på forbindelsen mellem hansestæderne og Norden, Det nordiske historikermøde i Århus 1957* (Århus, 1957; repr. 1972); G. A. Blom (ed.), *Urbaniseringsprosessen i Norden*, 1 (Oslo, 1977).

2 A. Andrén, 'State and towns in the Middle Ages: The Scandinavian experience', *Theory and Society*, 18 (1989), pp. 585–609. According to Andrén Scandinavian medieval towns were an integral part of a feudalised society, and he views their foundation from an ecological perspective, finding a connection between different ecological zones and town development. See also K. Helle, 'Towns', in P. Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1993), pp. 647–9.

excavation ever of an urban area in northern Europe,³ and in 1961 the first major excavation of medieval quarters in the centre of Lund was conducted.⁴ These two investigations set the standard for continued archaeological work, though the great breakthrough did not come until around 1970. After that rescue excavations necessitated by development in medieval town centres have more or less become the rule in Norway, Sweden and Finland. Due to different legislation archaeology has been more selective in Denmark, but there, too, similar tendencies can now be discerned.⁵ Little of the Scandinavian excavations have, however, been properly processed and published. The foremost examples of good analysis and publication come from Norway, above all from the excavations in Bergen, Oslo and Trondheim.⁶

When studying urbanisation in Scandinavia one should not be bound by national borders, which were not necessarily decisive. Comparisons may sometimes be more adequate if they follow divisions based on urban development as such. The network of contacts and communications can be used as a basis for one such division; in this respect the large waters served to unite. It is possible to discern a south-western region with urban characteristics of its own including medieval Denmark (with the present-day Swedish provinces of Skåne, Halland and Blekinge) and the German Baltic coast. A western region comprises medieval Norway and the western parts of medieval Sweden; the uniting factor in this case is the location on the edge of the Atlantic. A third region, united by the Baltic Sea, consists of central and eastern Sweden, Gotland and Finland. In the northern part of the Scandinavian peninsula and in Iceland, towns were strictly lacking in the Middle Ages but this does not mean that there were no tendencies towards urbanisation.

3 A. E. Herteig, 'The archaeological excavations at Bryggen, "The German Wharf", in Bergen, 1955–68: excavation, stratigraphy, chronology, field-documentation', in A. E. Herteig (ed.), *The Bryggen Papers*, Main Series, 1 (Bergen, 1985), pp. 9–46.

4 R. Blomqvist and A. W. Mortensson, *Thulegrävningen 1961* (Lund, 1963).

5 H. Andersson, 'Medieval archaeology in Scandinavia', in H. Andersson and J. Wienberg (eds.), *The Study of Medieval Archaeology: European symposium for Teachers of Medieval Archaeology*, Lund, 11–15 June 1990 (Stockholm, 1993), pp. 15–19.

6 *De arkeologiske utgravninger i Gamlebyen*, 1–10 (Oslo–Øvre Ervik, 1977–91); E. Schia, *Oslo innerst i Viken: Liv og virke i middelalderbyen* (Oslo, 1991); Ø. Lunde, *Trondheims fortid i bygrunnen: Middelalderbyens topografi på grunnlag av det arkeologiske materialet inntil 1970* (Riksantikvarens skrifter, 2, Trondheim, 1977); Herteig, 'The archaeological excavations at Bryggen'; A. E. Herteig, *The buildings at Bryggen: Their topographical and chronological development* (Herteig, ed., *The Bryggen Papers*, Main Series, 3: 1–2); A. Christophersen and S. W. Nordeide, *Kaupangen ved Nidelva* (Riksantikvarens skrifter, 7, Trondheim, 1994). For Sweden, see the volume published in English by the Central Board of National Antiquities: L. Ersgård et al. (eds.), *Rescue and Research: Reflections of Society in Sweden 700–1700 AD* (Stockholm, 1992).

The three town regions mentioned were parts of larger networks. The contacts of the Swedish–Finnish region were primarily with the eastern and southern parts of the Baltic, while those of the Danish region around Skagerrak–Kattegat were with the British Isles and western Europe. In the western Atlantic region the main external contacts originally ran east–west, but north–south connections were also important.

The concept of urbanisation

In early research in particular, there were tendencies to define the medieval urban system by relying on formal criteria such as town privileges. Such criteria are obviously relevant in a discussion of certain aspects of urbanisation and its role in modern society, but they are of little help in grasping the dynamic process that urbanisation and its various manifestations actually represented. This is obvious with regard to the earliest periods from which formal criteria are largely absent, but it is also relevant for later periods when privileged towns were only part of a more extensive urbanisation process.

How, then, to describe the status and character of localities that were, to various degrees, urbanised? A useful method emerged from a German discussion in the post-war period, when the concept of town was defined according to a number of functional and structural criteria describing urbanised places from different points of view. This method has been further developed in Scandinavian research.⁷

The criteria in question can be divided into three main groups: functional, topographical, and internal legal and administrative criteria. *Functional* criteria refer to the tasks performed by a locality as a central place in relation to its hinterland and to other places. By using these criteria the locality in question can be placed within a spatial system and its degree of centrality determined. *Topographical* criteria concern the physical morphology of a place, that is, the picture formed by settlement and plans. They make it possible to determine the degree to which a place is built up. Finally, the *internal legal and administrative* criteria show the formal status of a place, whether it has urban privileges or

7 H. Andersson, 'Sverige: En forskningsöversikt', in Blom (ed.), *Urbaniseringsprocessen*, 1, pp. 93–4. K. Helle has formulated a related view, presented briefly in Helle, 'Descriptions of Nordic towns and town-like settlements in early literature', in B. Ambrosiani and H. Clarke (eds.), *Developments Around the Baltic and the North Sea in the Viking Age* (Birka Studies, 3, Stockholm, 1994), p. 23. The main German inspiration for this approach is C. Haase, *Die Entstehung der westfälischen Städte* (Münster, 1960), which owes much to the 'central place' theory of W. Christaller, *Die Zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland: Eine ökonomisch-geographische Untersuchung über die Gesetzmässigkeit der Verbreitung und Entwicklung der Siedlungen mit städtischen Funktionen* (Jena, 1933).

laws, a council, mayor, town seal, and so on. These three types of criteria should be combined with other parameters, especially chronological, but also geographical.

It goes without saying that these criteria do not in themselves constitute an explanatory model, but they permit the grouping of different types of places and make it possible to handle the fluid boundaries and grey zones in a practical way. They make it clear that urbanisation is a broader concept than town development. It can be defined, in a time-honoured way, as 'the confluence of people that occurs in certain places, with consequent densification of settlement and the emergence of differentiated activities',⁸ but is this definition broad enough? What happens if we shift the emphasis from densification and settlement concentration to central functions?

Central places may have only one specialised function or they may have a complex of functions. If the latter is combined with built-up settlement and a distinct legal-administrative structure the place can safely be defined as a town. However, some of the central functions performed by towns can also be carried out in or near other types of central place, for example a castle. Should such places, too, be included in the concept of urbanisation?

In Scandinavia there are large areas where no urban system was developed until the late Middle Ages or even later. There were no proper medieval towns north of a border running from Rauma in Finland in the east, via Gävle in Sweden, to Trondheim in Norway; nor were there any such towns in Iceland and the other Norse island communities of the Atlantic. In other areas, such as the interior of southern Norway or western Sweden, urban densification did not take place until late in the Middle Ages. Should such areas be left out of the concept of urbanisation? Or were urbanising tendencies here expressed differently in the Middle Ages?

Earlier research, inspired by Henri Pirenne in particular, emphasised that towns were a result of economic development, especially long-distance trade, but in recent years the stress has been more on the role of towns as part of the exercise of power. In Scandinavian research the latter view came to the foreground at the Nordic historical conference in Trondheim in 1977, though it had already been formulated in advance, particularly in Norwegian research. Since then it has become common for archaeologists and historians to emphasise that the medieval towns must be seen as part of a power structure, and that urbanisation is a process in which the search for political control over people and territories plays a major role.

8 Andersson, 'Sverige', p. 94.

It is in no way self-evident, then, that urbanisation should be associated solely with the towns for which there is clear medieval evidence. The process comprised other types of central places: castles, marketplaces, harbours, and so on. There were also systems of places with various central functions scattered within 'central areas', that is, the opposite of a town where everything is concentrated in one place. This interpretative model has proved useful for Viking Age Norway and in the Middle Ages for Iceland, the Kalmar district in south-east Sweden, and Norwegian Bohuslän.⁹ In short, this means that there were tendencies towards urban development also in areas without towns. Such tendencies are worth studying and should be included in the wider concept of urbanisation.

Thus defined, urbanisation can be seen as part of the general political, administrative and economic development, and is in certain situations difficult to distinguish from the organisational development towards a state-like political system. There is, for instance, little doubt that the making of the Scandinavian kingdoms, as treated above, included the promotion of towns as administrative and military centres from which surrounding districts could be controlled.

At the same time it should be borne clearly in mind that there is a need for central functions outside a centralised political system and that there are consequently central places with a different background. Places or functions based solely on local needs can be seen as the result of competing systems. Such localities could, perhaps to a much greater extent than the central places of the kingdoms, acquire a different character from that of towns. There was, however, hardly an absolute boundary between centralist and local systems. A local central place could of course be taken over by the king without losing its earlier functions. Some of the towns that received urban privileges in the late Middle Ages can be perceived of in this way.

For the early periods lack of evidence makes it difficult to distinguish between the two types of central places. There is an early phase of urbanising tendencies, beginning in the eighth century and lasting into the early Middle Ages, for which there is mainly archaeological evidence, difficult to interpret in political terms. The problem also applies to the high and late Middle Ages when

9 K. Helle and A. Nedkvitne, 'Norge: Sentrumsdannelser og byutvikling i norsk middelalder', in Blom (ed.) *Urbaniseringsprosessen*, 1, pp. 203–5; H. Þorláksson, 'Island: Urbaniseringstendenser på Island i middelalderen', *ibid.*, pp. 164–74; N. Blomkvist, 'Kalmars uppkomst och äldsta tid', in I. Hammarström (ed.), *Kalmar stads historia*, 1 (Kalmar, 1979), pp. 195–9; U. E. Hagberg, 'Den förhistoriska kalmarbygden', *ibid.*, pp. 82–6; H. Andersson, 'Medeltidsarkeologi i Bohuslän', in *Festskrift til Olaf Olsen på 60-års dagen den 7. juni 1988* (København, 1988), pp. 181–3.

urbanisation connected with state development is relatively easy to perceive, whereas evidence can be lacking for locally determined urbanisation.

Early tendencies towards urbanisation

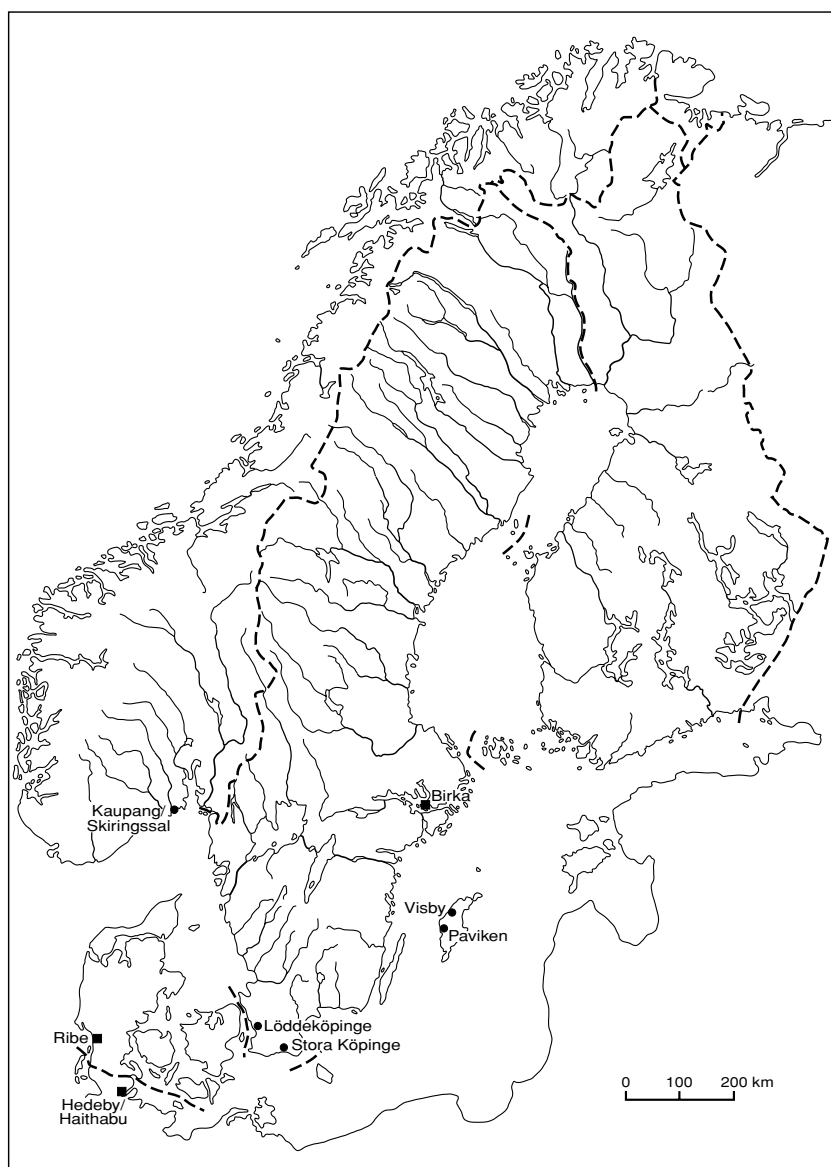
The earliest known tendencies towards urbanisation in Scandinavia manifest themselves in the economic and political centres of the Merovingian Period and the early Viking Age mentioned in various connections above (see Chapters 3, 5–7, 8(b), 8(c), 8(e)). They can be more clearly perceived from the eighth century onwards (Map 13).¹⁰

We have already seen that Ribe on the south-west coast of Jylland was a centre of considerable importance from the beginning of the eighth century. Before this, Ribe has been seen as a seasonal site but there is evidence suggesting that this is not wholly correct. Archaeologically, Ribe presents itself as a well-planned and well-organised merchants' community from its founding in around 705, important enough to justify the assumption that royal power was behind its establishment. There are other constructions, including the Danevirke earthworks from 737, which would seem to indicate that there was a strong kingdom ruling southern Jylland and probably also other parts of Denmark at that time.

Ribe's contacts were mainly with the west. Links with the kingdom of the Franks in particular were important, but Norway is also represented in the material, as is the Black Sea area. Contacts between Ribe and Birka west of Stockholm have been demonstrated by recent excavations in the Birka. Ribe appears to have replaced another nearby central place, Dankirke, thought to have been controlled by a regional or local chieftain. The existence of Ribe would thus be one of a number of signs that a new political structure was taking shape.

Ribe developed further. A 'town ditch' was added in the early ninth century but it was not until the end of the tenth century that Ribe was fortified; after that the town continued to expand outside the old boundaries. According to Rimbert it was one of the missionary centres organised by Ansgar around 860; a church was built there on a piece of land donated by the king. By 948 a bishop of Ribe had been appointed.

¹⁰ A survey of current archaeological research into urbanisation in this early period is provided by B. Ambrosiani and H. Clarke, *Towns in the Viking Age* (Leicester, 1994). A survey of contemporaneous written information on early urbanisation in Scandinavia can be found in Helle, 'Descriptions', pp. 20–8.



Map 13 Examples of the early tendency towards urbanisation

Viking Age Ribe was, then, a central place of some complexity with a distinct physical structure. Urbanising tendencies can be followed over a lengthy period, but it is a moot point whether Ribe's development can be called continuous. The character of the place changed radically as its economic orientation shifted from long-distance to more local trade. As part of this process, topographical displacements occurred. The main built-up areas shifted within the later and larger town area, the main shift being that of the medieval town centre, which moved to the southern side of the narrow river Ribe Å.

The same general course of development was presumably followed by Hedeby/Schleswig. There was, however, a topographical shift from Viking Age Hedeby to medieval Schleswig. The places lay on either side of the head of the fjord of Schlei, near the large defensive rampart of Danevirke. Hedeby is mentioned as *Sliethorp* at the start of the ninth century but can be taken back by archaeological evidence to the mid-eighth century. Ansgar built a church there in about 850, with the permission of the Danish king, and there, as in Ribe, a bishop had been appointed by 948. *Vita Anskarii* also mentions a local reeve (*comes vici*) in Hedeby, installed and deposed by the king of the Danes.

Topographically, Hedeby started out as an open settlement, but it was enclosed by a large rampart in the tenth century. The last archaeological datings take activities there up to the start of the eleventh century whereas medieval Schleswig can be traced back to 1071. There is no doubt that one place followed the other but the physical shift from Hedeby to Schleswig is so marked that some interruption must have occurred in the urban development at the head of Schlei.

Birka is the last of the three best known Scandinavian emporia of the Viking Age, known through Rimbert's account of the missionary endeavours of Ansgar there from about 830. It is situated on an island in Lake Mälaren west of Stockholm, and has left rich remains in the form of settled areas, forts, ramparts and large cemeteries. The archaeological evidence suggests that urbanising tendencies started in the eighth century and that the place functioned as a centre until the end of the tenth century. Across a sound from Birka lies the island of Adelsö with a royal estate that had its roots in prehistory and the Viking Age.

The excavations at Birka have mostly been conducted in the large cemeteries on the island, and to a lesser extent in the settlement area. In recent years part of the harbour area has also been investigated. Wide contacts and a differentiated population are reflected in the archaeological material. So far the finds from the harbour area testify to significant craft work of an almost industrial character. Scholarly discussions have often emphasised Birka's role as a harbour for

long-distance trade, but one can hardly deny the place a central role in its local hinterland as well. According to Rimbert, the king played a major role there, but little is known about the extent of his power outside the place. The royal estate on Adelsö should, however, be remembered. There was also, as told by Rimbert, some form of urban government, in the form of a royal town prefect (*praefectus vici*) and what appears to have been a town assembly or *thing*.

In Norway, the port of Skiringssal was clearly important in the Viking Age. It was visited by the Norwegian magnate and trader Ottar on his journey from northern Norway to Hedeby in about 890 or slightly earlier, and can be safely identified with the locality of Kaupang ('trading place') in Vestfold, west of the mouth of Oslofjord. Graves and settlement layers have yielded rich archaeological material, revealing contacts with both western and eastern Europe from the late eighth century until the end of the ninth, when settlement appears to have come to an end. Skiringssal should be reckoned among the emporia that existed around the North Sea and the Baltic in the Viking Age, quite likely as parts of an incipient royal power system.

Ribe, Hedeby, Birka and Skiringssal, which have been chosen here to exemplify the earliest tendencies towards urbanisation in Scandinavia, can be described as tentative efforts. They were, however, also relatively well developed communities (at least in the case of Birka with some kind of urban government) which formed part of a more extensive development around the North Sea and in the Baltic area in the Merovingian and Viking periods. Some of these places, such as Quentovic in northern France, which can be traced right back to c. AD 600, and Dorestad, also with its roots in the seventh century, are well known through archaeological excavations. On the other side of the English Channel centres such as Hamwic and Ipswich were of the same character. On the southern shores of the Baltic there were corresponding places such as Menzlin, Ralswiek, Wolin, and further north Grobin in present-day Latvia.

The places mentioned were all of them trading sites associated with long-distance trade and strategically located along important watercourses. In the terminology of K. Polanyi and his followers they have been called 'ports of trade', implying not least that they were controlled by royal power in one form or another. They are also known as *wik*-places because several of them have names ending in that appellation (meaning 'trading place' or 'settlement of merchants'). Altogether they can be seen as a reflection of the new momentum gained by exchange of commodities in western Europe in the Merovingian and Viking Ages, following the decline connected with the collapse of the Roman Empire.

The Scandinavian centres referred to also had a local and regional hinterland. There are, however, other Scandinavian places with a more pronounced local background, among them a number of localities in Skåne with names ending in *-köpinge*, the basic meaning of which is some kind of trading site. Of these only Löddeköpinge and Stora Köpinge have seen major excavations. The *köpinge*-places go back to the Merovingian and Viking periods, and some of them survived into the early Middle Ages. In the ninth century Löddeköpinge had seasonal settlement within a semicircular rampart. Later in the same century a larger permanent settlement developed, and a cemetery and a wooden church can be dated to the eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

The *köpinge*-places are situated relatively close to medieval towns, which has led to the assumption that they were predecessors of such towns. More recent studies have made it difficult to maintain this view. Stora Köpinge, for example, was formerly taken to be the forerunner of the high medieval town of Ystad on the south coast of Skåne. The interrupted extension of the church of Stora Köpinge was interpreted as evidence that the growth of Stora Köpinge ceased when Ystad was founded in the mid-thirteenth century. However, dendrochronological studies have later shown that the church was not extended until the end of the thirteenth century, when the town of Ystad had already developed quite far. There is thus no clear connection between the disappearance of Stora Köpinge and the emergence of Ystad. Rather it appears that there may be some justification for the view that the *köpinge*-sites were economic central places of local magnates whereas the towns belonged to the king.¹¹

Another elusive phenomenon is the role played in the localisation of Danish medieval towns by *kongeleiv*, that is, royal estates listed in the thirteenth-century *King Valdemar's Land Register*. It has been shown that early minting was associated with some of these places and their situation links them to several of the later medieval towns. This may be interpreted as further corroboration of Cinthio's hypothesis that we are dealing with two different categories of central place, those associated with royal power and those of a more local origin.¹²

Around the coast of Gotland there are a number of harbour sites; one of these is Visby, which can be dated back to the late seventh century. They served as harbours for the local farms but there are also early indications that some

11 E. Cinthio, 'Variationsmuster im dem frühmittelalterlichen Städtewesen Schonens', in *Frühe Städte im westlichen Ostseeraum. Kiel Papers* 72 (Kiel, 1973), pp. 57–64.

12 A. Andrén, 'Städer och kungamakt – en studie i Danmarks geografi före 1230', *Scandia* 49 (1983), pp. 31–61.

of them developed into more specialised places. The best known is Paviken where there is archaeological evidence of a boatyard. In Västergarn a rampart and the start of work on a church indicates that there was at least a plan to establish a more urbanised centre. The enterprise was, however, discontinued, and Visby was the only place in Gotland to develop into a fully-fledged town. It is worth noting, though, that well into the Middle Ages seafaring peasants continued to trade in direct competition with the urban merchants of the rapidly expanding town of Visby.

Most of the places referred to above give the impression of not having been particularly complex. They may have been part of a 'central area' system of the kind referred to above, within which they had an economic central function, leaving politico-administrative and other central functions to nearby localities. In Norway Skiringssal has been fitted into a system of this kind,¹³ and the same may hold good for places such as Löddeköpinge and Stora Köpinge in Skåne.

How far the more important Viking Age centres of Ribe, Hedeby and Birka should be regarded as having developed an urban character is a debatable question. Their economic centrality is well established. There is also literary evidence for their function as Christian missionary centres with early churches and eventually bishops appointed to them. Royal presence and influence is supported in all of them and local royal officials are explicitly mentioned in Birka and Hedeby, with the former also having an apparent local assembly. It may be said, then, that all three places at least possessed in embryonic form the general, complex centrality of later medieval towns. As they were in addition relatively densely populated and built-up it has been argued that they qualify as the first Scandinavian towns.¹⁴

Another debatable question is whether there was in Scandinavia a continuous development from Viking Age centres to the towns of the Middle Ages. In Norway the relatively few medieval towns came into being at the expense of a much wider network of seasonal local and regional centres, but some of them may nevertheless have developed continuously from Viking Age roots. In recent Swedish urban archaeology there has, on the other hand, been a tendency to place Viking Age central places and medieval towns in different contexts and to argue for a degree of discontinuity between them. Birka apparently ceased to function as a central place at the end of the tenth century when the urban development of Sigtuna further north started, and we shall see that the continuity between the two places is disputed. Hedeby in the course of the

¹³ Helle and Nedkvitne, 'Norge', pp. 203–5.

¹⁴ Helle, 'Descriptions', p. 27.

eleventh century was succeeded by Schleswig on the other side of the Schlei. This shift of settlement and even the more modest translocations of the Ribe settlement have been used to throw doubt on the continuity of urban development in these two cases. The shift from Hedeby to Schleswig has, however, also been seen as a continuous development caused by the increasing use of larger ships with a deeper draught.

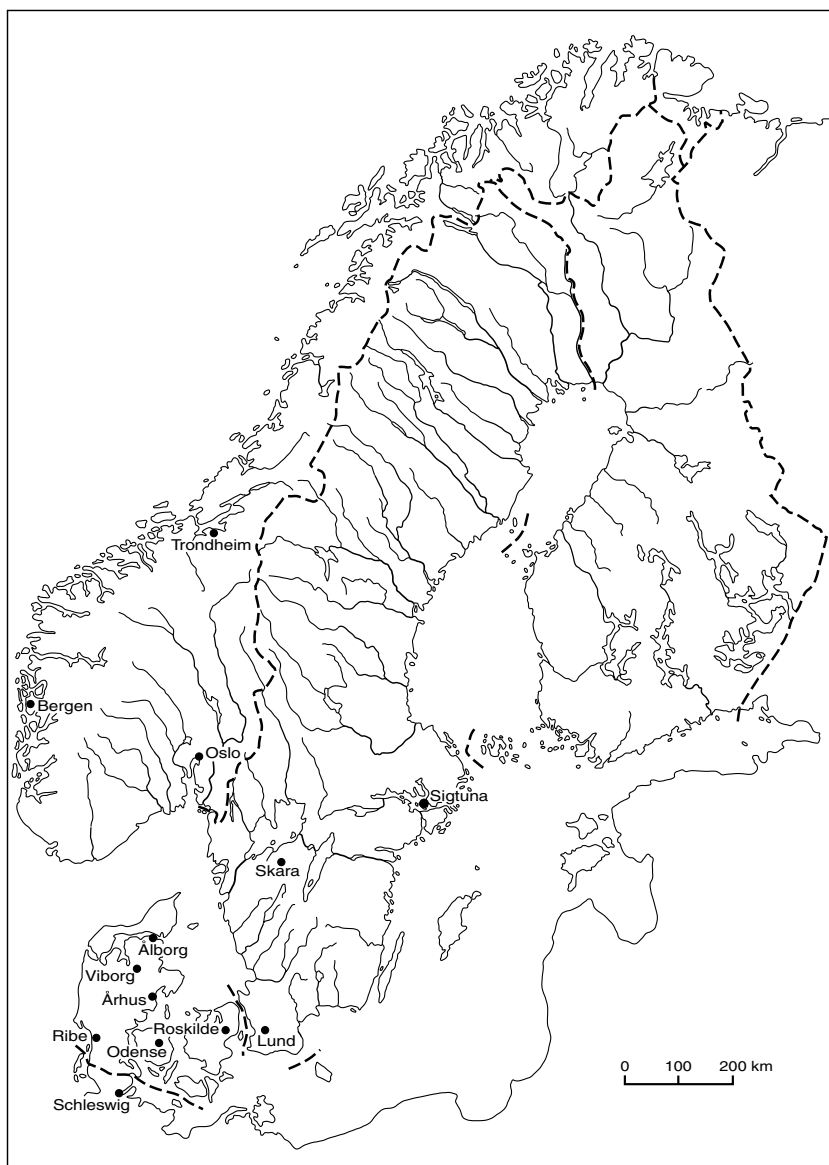
Early medieval towns

Irrespective of the question of continuity there can be little doubt that Scandinavian urbanisation entered a new phase from the latter part of the tenth century. From now on there is evidence of several places with a more complex centrality (Map 14). This is attested by the presence of the Church and a more centralised royal government, by forms of organisation, and by physical structure. Places of particular importance in this context are Lund in medieval Denmark, Sigtuna in Sweden, and Trondheim, Oslo and Bergen in Norway.

The earliest settlement of Lund can be traced from the 990s; it comprised a large churchyard with one of Skåne's first churches but was otherwise of rural character. By c. 1020 a new area with a simple plan, Södergatan, came into use. There was a mint operating there before 1050 and another churchyard seems to have developed in the same phase. The settlement pattern was still relatively scattered and not connected with street-lines. By c. 1050 archaeology suggests that there were at least seven parish churches in the town, perhaps two more. Within the following decade an episcopal see was established and the earliest remains of the cathedral may go as far back as this. St Knud's charter of 1085 (see Chapter 8(b)) mentions an annual due to the king from tenements in Lund and there are clear remains of a royal manor from the end of the eleventh century. In 1103–4 we have seen that a Scandinavian archbishopric was established with Lund as its centre (Chapter 7). The town, then, developed rapidly from the first settlement on the site, with an evident ecclesiastical dominance.¹⁵

Sigtuna, north of Lake Mälaren and Birka, can also be traced back to the late tenth century. Recent archaeological investigations have shown that a regular plot structure was established in the initial phase. The earliest mint of Scandinavia has been uncovered here, confirming earlier coin evidence that minting took place in Sigtuna from about AD 1000. The town plan is unusual,

15 A. Andrén, *Lund, tomtindelning, ägostruktur, sockenbildning* (Stockholm, 1984); A. Andrén, *Den urbana scenen: Städer och samhälle i det medeltida Danmark* (*Acta archaeologica Lundensis*, Series in 8°, 13, Lund, 1985). Andrén points out that an urban pattern with more than two churches, sometimes many more, is characteristic of this period.



Map 14 Early medieval towns

with churches lying in a ring around the settlement. Unfortunately, the dating of these churches is still highly uncertain. The only church that can so far be dated to the earliest phase of urbanisation had a different location, right in the centre of the settlement.

That Sigtuna had a planned character right from the start has been taken to indicate that the town was founded as a bridgehead for a royal power expanding from Västergötland towards the old Svealand (cf. Chapter 8(e)), an interpretation comparable to that put forward for early Oslo (see below). In previous research, however, Sigtuna was seen as a link between Birka and Stockholm; the three settlements were assumed to have succeeded each other as central places in the Mälaren region. The relative chronology of Birka and Sigtuna has not been completely clarified, but there appears to be an overlap which calls into question any simplified assumption of continuity.¹⁶ Such an assumption should at any rate be based on more than immediate chronological succession and the question of continuity should be seen in a wider societal context.

The first towns of Norway witnessed a vigorous development in the early Middle Ages. Due at least partly to a favourable source situation, they include some of the clearest examples of Scandinavian urbanisation in that period. The results of extensive excavations in Bergen, Oslo and Trondheim have been published and referred to above. There is also important written information on the earliest Norwegian towns in the kings' sagas and chronicles recorded from the twelfth century onwards.

According to later Norse-Icelandic historiography the town of Trondheim has its roots in the reign of King Olaf Tryggvason in the latter half of the 990s, but there is also a tradition of some houses already standing there when Olaf first visited the place. The processing of the archaeological material from Trondheim¹⁷ has led to the conclusion that there were sporadic, yet recurrent, activities in the central area of the later town during most of the tenth century, particularly in the latter half, when there was a division into parcels along an inlet from the river Nid, comparable to what happened in Ribe's earliest phase. Craft activities were still of little significance, being of a domestic character. The rather scarce archaeological material has nevertheless been taken to support

¹⁶ E. Floderus, *Sigtuna, Sveriges äldsta medeltidsstad* (Stockholm, 1941); S. Tesch, 'Sigtuna: Stronghold and early town', in L. Nilsson and S. Lilja (eds.), *The Emergence of Towns: Archaeology and Early Urbanization in Non-Roman North-West Europe* (*Studier i stads- och kommunhistoria*, 14, Stockholm, 1996), pp. 113–21.

¹⁷ The results of the excavations of the so-called Library Site in Trondheim have been published and put into a wider urban historical context with an English summary in Christophersen and Nordeide, *Kaupangen ved Nidelva*.

the existence of a pre-urban trading centre west of the mouth of the river Nid – ‘a centre for collection, storage, and trade in a supraregional system of exchange’.¹⁸ The leaders of this system would have been the earls of Lade on the opposite side of the mouth of the river. This would seem to reflect the ‘central area’ structure mentioned above, within which different places in a local district had one central function each.

At the end of the tenth century Trondheim is believed to have entered the first phase of its urban history. There were now great changes in the spatial organisation of the area. More permanent buildings were erected, preceded by large-scale groundwork, signalling a switch from sporadic to permanent settlement. The parcel system was expanded and the original parcels subdivided. An increased level of activity is indicated by a considerable growth of the occupation layer, and there are clear signs of commodity transactions. There was in other words an obvious and many-sided change in Trondheim’s development around the turn of the century, a change that cannot be dated exactly but in which the role of instigator has nevertheless been ascribed to King Olaf Tryggvason. He is thought to have regulated the site, building a royal estate and possibly a church. In general he strengthened the centrality of the north-east corner of the Nidarnes peninsula (between the river Nid and Trondheimsfjord) by bringing together there and regularising the economic, politico-administrative, judicial and cultic functions which had earlier been scattered over a wider central area. Thus a town of great strategic significance came into being under the control of the king. The importance of this interpretation, in which there are of course uncertain elements, lies not least in the distinction made between the early phase dominated by the earls of Lade, and the later phase associated with the king.

In Oslo graveyards belonging to two older churches have been found under the ruins of St Clement’s church from about 1100, the oldest of them going back to about AD 1000, possibly even a decade or two earlier. The orientation of the graves corresponded to that of later central streets and buildings, indicating that Oslo at that time already had an incipient town-like physical structure. This has been further taken to indicate that urbanisation started with the establishment of a royal Danish bridgehead there towards the end of the tenth century, in order to strengthen the Danish control over the Oslofjord area of Viken (cf. Chapters 8(b)–8(c)).¹⁹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹⁹ O. E. Eide, ‘De toskipede kirker i Oslo: Et forsøk på redatering og opphavsbestemmelse med utgangspunkt i de siste utgravninger i Clemenskirken’ (unpublished master’s dissertation, University of Bergen, 1974); E. Schia, ‘Urban Oslo: Evolution from a royal

The indications of early urbanisation in Oslo would seem to conflict with the information given by Snorri Sturluson in *Heimskringla* (c. 1230), that it was King Harald Hard-ruler who had a town erected there in about 1050. There are, however, traces of considerable groundwork and building activity in the royal estate of Oslo at that time, and it appears that King Harald in his turn used Oslo as a bridgehead and administrative centre when Opplandene (the interior of Østlandet) was finally brought under Norwegian royal control during his reign (Chapter 8(c)). His town-promoting role in Oslo may have earned him his place as founding father in the later saga tradition.²⁰

Bergen, according to the later saga tradition, acquired the status of a town in the reign of King Olaf Kyrre (1067–93). So far, extensive archaeological excavations have failed to produce evidence for earlier urbanisation. Recent palaeo-botanical investigations have, however, yielded indications of more than agricultural activities in the central urban area east of the harbour bay of Vågen from the Merovingian Period and more clearly from the Viking Age. This would seem to strengthen earlier assumptions of some kind of coastal village in Bergen before Olaf Kyrre's time. Vågen may have served as harbour for the royal estate of Alrekstad, 2 km to the south-east, possibly a seat of petty kings in the Merovingian Period, and may also have functioned as a meeting place (perhaps seasonal). Possibly, the Bergen district was a pre-urban central area of roughly the same type suggested for Skiringssal and Trondheim. Comparable areas may have been points of departure for the development of the small west Norwegian towns of Stavanger, Kaupanger, Borgund and Veøy.²¹

King Olaf Kyrre's role in Bergen may then have been to promote an earlier coastal centre into a town. He planned and probably also completed the establishment of the first permanent episcopal seat of Vestlandet in Bergen and quite probably made Bergen a formal town, separating it legally and administratively from the surrounding countryside. He may also have parcelled out plots for urban tenements in the Bryggen area east of Vågen. Olaf's grandson, King Eystein Magnusson (1103–22), moved the royal seat from Alrekstad to a new royal estate at the mouth of Vågen and it was during this time, if not earlier, that Bergen started to develop into an international trading centre,

stronghold and administrative centre', in S. Myrvoll et al. (eds.), *Archaeology and the Urban Economy, Festschrift to Asbjørn E. Herteig* (Arkeologiske skrifter fra Historisk Museum, Universitet i Bergen, 5, Bergen 1989), pp. 57–68; Schia, *Oslo innerst i Viken*, pp. 116–20, 126–31; P. Norseng, 'Byen blir til', in A. Nedkvitne and P. Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg (Oslo bys historie, 1, Oslo 1991)*, pp. 14–23, 37.

²⁰ Schia, *Oslo innerst i Viken*, pp. 111–15, 133–4.

²¹ K. Helle, 'Tidligbyutvikling i Vestnorge', in I. Øye (ed.), *Onsdagskvelder i Bryggens Museum*, 7 (Bergen, 1992), pp. 7–30.

based above all on the export of stockfish and other fish products (see Chapter 10). This function was to be the driving force behind the rapid expansion of the town throughout the high Middle Ages, documented by a rich written source material and not least by the large-scale archaeological excavations in the Bryggen area and lesser investigations elsewhere in the medieval town.²²

Early medieval urbanisation is less known in present-day Denmark than in Norway, but it was nevertheless there, in the most populous region of Scandinavia and the one closest to Europe, that the process was most extensive. In the 1070s Adam of Bremen professed to know of several *civitates* in the Danish kingdom – besides Lund in Skåne, places such as Roskilde in Sjælland, Odense in Fyn, Hedeby/Schleswig, Ribe, Århus, Viborg and Ålborg in Jylland. Some of them are known as royal minting places in the reign of King Knut the Great in the early part of the eleventh century. Minting in Knut's name took place in a total of thirteen localities of which ten are later known as medieval towns.²³ There can be little doubt that at least half a score of Danish medieval towns went through an early formative period in the eleventh century.

Most of the early medieval towns of Scandinavia had several churches, usually three or more, though some had only two. Based on evidence from the Danish kingdom it has been argued that these churches did not distinguish themselves physically from those of the surrounding countryside, and the early medieval towns have consequently been referred to as 'congested countryside'. This congestion would be connected with the existing or perhaps new power structure of which the royal estate was the obvious nodal point, linked to evidence of minting and other central activities.²⁴ There is also scarce written information suggesting royal dominance, such as the special midsummer fee mentioned in St Knud's charter of 1085, owed to the king from tenements in Lund, Lomma and Helsingborg.

It is a debatable question how far this picture, based chiefly on conditions in Lund, can be applied to other early medieval towns. As regards royal influence, however, the fundamental town-promoting role of the Norwegian monarchy of that period seems to be well established, a role that also included the foundation of the first episcopal sees.

The physical structure of the early medieval towns is still too little known, though it has in a few cases been uncovered by archaeological excavations. In

22 K. Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad, Fra opphavet til 1536* (Bergen bys historie, 1, Bergen 1982); Helle, 'Tidlig byutvikling'; Herteig, *The Buildings at Bryggen*.

23 A. E. Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', in Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 1 (København, 1977), pp. 318–20; Helle, 'Descriptions', pp. 21–2.

24 Andréén, *Den urbana scenen*, pp. 41–3, 77–9.

Sigtuna and Trondheim there was, in the earliest phases, a clear plot structure with relatively closely placed tenements facing the main streets. In Bergen the layout of double tenements at Bryggen (two rows of houses with a passage in between stretching from the harbour to the Upper Street behind) has been traced back to the first half of the twelfth century, and it has been suggested that the plot structure of the Bryggen tenements had already been established by King Olaf Kyrre in the late eleventh century.²⁵ In Oslo, too, there appears to have been a stable plot structure from the eleventh century, but at that time the plots were only sparsely built-up in the small areas that have been excavated. In Lund the earliest phase was characterised by relatively scattered tenements grouped around the churches; a more densely built-up settlement does not occur until the end of the twelfth century.

The topography of each town clearly varies, though a regular plot structure seems to go far back in most of the cases referred to above. The young towns of the eleventh century would still have generally been only sparsely built-up. On the other hand, all the places referred to appear to have had the functional complexity that is considered an important criterion for towns in the true sense of the word.

At the same time there were tendencies across much of Scandinavia leading to urbanisation in places that had not yet reached the functional and physical level of towns. Among these should probably be included the early diocesan centres of Sweden, with the exception of the more developed Skara, which had possible links with Norway, and Sigtuna. The centrality of such places and their twelfth-century parallels, Stavanger and Hamar, in Norway may already have been built on other functions than that of ecclesiastical power, with roots possibly in an older central area structure where there were sites of public assemblies or *things* with a politico-legal function. Such a structure would then have been taken over by the church. This may also have happened in Denmark, for instance in the cases of Odense and Viborg. But there is so far neither written nor archaeological evidence that the ecclesiastical centres in the early Middle Ages had developed far enough, both functionally and physically, to qualify as towns. This had to wait until the following high Middle Ages.

Spread of towns in the high Middle Ages

Sweden and Denmark, like the rest of western Europe, saw a broader wave of urbanisation from about 1200, whereas Norway shows a different pattern

²⁵ G. A. Ersland, 'Kven eigde byen' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen, 1994), pp. 64–76.

with respect to places with the formal status of town (Map 15). Only a few new places reached town status in Norway in the high Middle Ages; there was thus little significant change in the early medieval urban structure. Existing towns were, however, expanding rapidly, most conspicuously in the case of Bergen.

Most of the new high medieval towns were established in the central parts of the Danish kingdom, including Skåne, and in the Mälaren area of Sweden with its extension towards the south and towards Finland (Åbo). These areas attained a considerable density of towns and the urban structure remained firmly established for a very long time; its medieval roots are in fact still perceptible. Behind this rapid urbanisation lay the development of more state-like Danish and Swedish kingdoms, as well as purely economic factors. The kingdoms had their centres of gravity in precisely these areas. In other parts of Sweden it is hardly possible to speak of more than strongpoints, such as Lödöse in Västergötland and Kalmar in Småland. In the Danish kingdom the situation was much the same in the peripheral provinces of Halland and Blekinge.

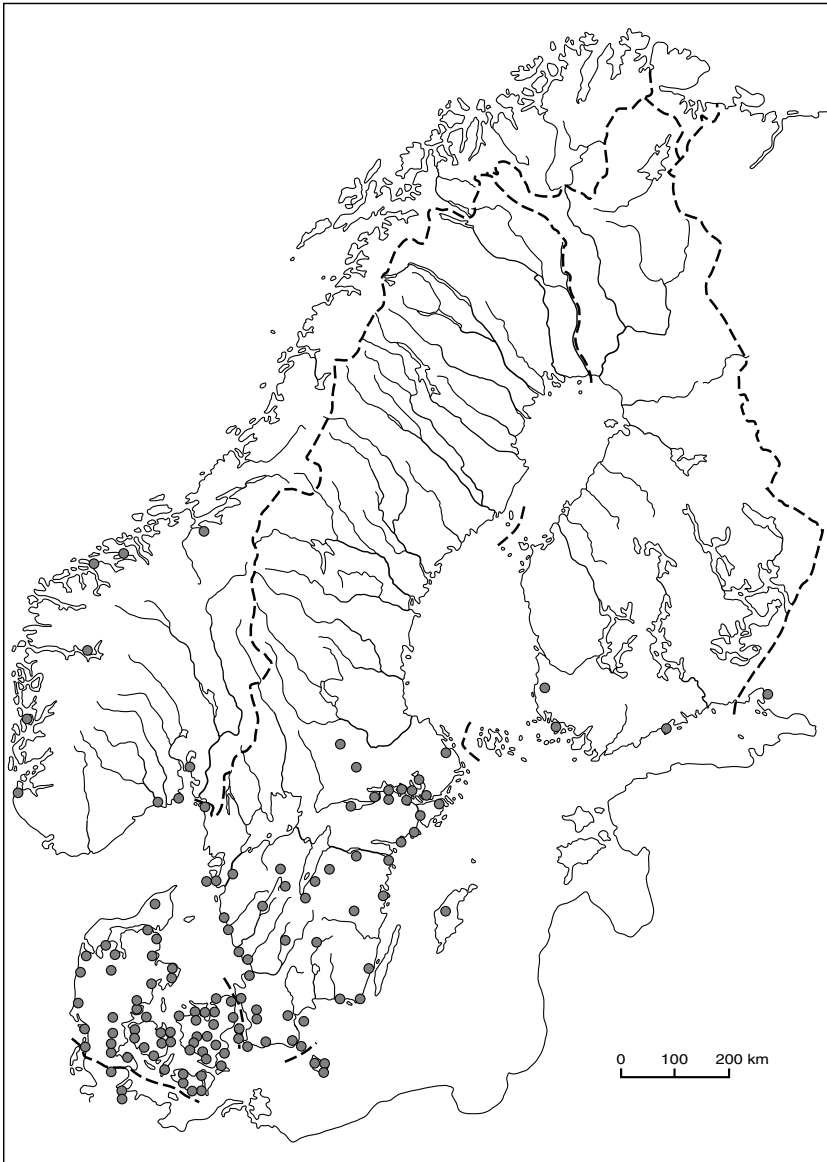
The topography of the new towns was different from that of the previous phase. Most of them had only one church, at least in the initial phase.²⁶ They give a distinct impression of having broken out of an existing parish organisation, rather than being integral parts of such a system. A few examples from Skåne may illustrate some aspects of the high medieval development.

Helsingborg shows unambiguous signs of being an early medieval town, with several churches mentioned in written sources and documented by archaeology. There was a ring-wall and a round tower near where the defensive tower of Kärnan was built in the early fourteenth century. The earliest settlement was on the castle-like hill running behind the coast with a broad strip of shore below, towards Öresund. There are traces of early medieval activity on the shore, but no urban settlement was established here until the thirteenth century when there was a radical shift of settlement. The hill now became the site of a castle with the tower of Kärnan.

By studying the town plan of Ystad in southern Skåne one can see how the natural roads to the coast from the hinterland parishes were interrupted by the town. Some of these roads running north–south must originally have led to the harbours of the respective parishes. The town area appears to have been carved out of the territory of the villages, though there is no information on how this change came about.

The new towns of Skåne were not normally located on virgin sites. In many of them, especially along the coasts of the Baltic and Öresund, there are distinct

²⁶ Andrén, *Den urbana scenen*, pp. 43–8.



Map 15 Density of towns 1150–1350

traces of earlier activity. Clay-lined pits, for example, have been found both inside and outside the medieval town boundaries and are mostly dated to the twelfth century. Some of them are later, however, from the early fourteenth century and are found, mainly in Skanör and Falsterbo, the central area of the international Skåne Fairs.²⁷ Various interpretations of these pits have been suggested, from contraptions for fish preparation to marks indicating land granted by the king.

At Skanör and Falsterbo the herring was caught, prepared and transported away by merchants from the south, notably from the towns on the southern shore of the Baltic. Although archaeological material suggests an expansion of urban activity at least from the twelfth century, it was in the thirteenth century that the Skåne Fairs saw their most vigorous development, first in the northern part and then also in the southern part of the Falsterbo peninsula. This does not help to fully explain the clay-lined pits, nor to clarify their link with the urbanisation of high medieval times. However, they have in common their location on the coast where fishing played a major role. If the pits are to be interpreted as markers, they would also demonstrate royal influence over a lengthy period.

The royal influence is at any rate clear in the high medieval towns of Skåne, where urban law codes and privileges were granted to the towns by kings, and royal castles or estates were built in the most important towns. The king was often represented in the town government by urban officials. At the Skåne Fairs his presence was clearly noticeable in the two royal castles of which there are still traces on the ground. Thus, with regard to the towns' heavy dependence on royal power, little had changed from the preceding period. At the same time, it is clear that the 'commercial revolution' of the high Middle Ages added considerably to the importance of economic activity as an urbanising factor.

In parts of the Danish kingdom other than Skåne, towns in the Valdemarian area from the latter half of the twelfth century started to spread from protected sites inland or at narrow inlets to the open coasts. This pattern partly had to do with the sheltering function of royal and other strongholds that were erected in places such as Vordingborg, Søborg, Havn (København) and Kalundborg. The Valdemarian kings included such castles together with earlier urban centres in their administrative system. At the same time, the general commercial expansion of the period was a driving force behind increased urbanisation.

27 L. Ersgård, '*Vår marknad i Skåne*' – bebyggelse, handel och urbanisering i Skanör och Falsterbo under medeltiden (Stockholm, 1988), pp. 41–7.

In central Sweden similar developments are discernible. In the thirteenth century the Mälaren valley saw rapid urbanisation that was built on older structures. We have already seen that the early medieval diocesan structure may have been built on an older central area system whose major assembly or *thing* sites preceded the episcopal sees. In the foundation charter of the new Swedish ecclesiastical province from 1164, Uppsala (Old Uppsala) is named as the metropolitan centre while the other dioceses had their episcopal sees at Linköping, Strängnäs and Västerås; outside this area was Skara.

In several places in central Sweden a nascent built-up structure has been shown by archaeology to have existed before 1200. The clearest examples are Söderköping and Skänninge in Östergötland, Nyköping, Strängnäs, and perhaps Tuna (later Eskilstuna) in Södermanland, and Västerås in Västmanland, as well as Uppsala in Uppland. Quite a few of the most important towns of the thirteenth century, then, had their roots in earlier settlements.

Nevertheless there appears to have been a significant qualitative change in the thirteenth century, very distinct in the case of Söderköping. Around 1220 settlement here grew denser and was restructured, and the composition of archaeological finds from that time changes. In Visby archaeological investigations indicate an important change with the building of stone houses from the 1220s. Comparable changes can be detected in other central Swedish towns. Stockholm, it is true, cannot be traced back further than the 1250s, a traditional dating that has not been shaken by recent archaeological work. However, Stockholm underwent exceptionally vigorous development in the second half of the thirteenth century when it acquired a key position in the Mälaren area and the Gulf of Bothnia. This position was consolidated in the urban code of King Magnus Eriksson from about 1350, according to which all foreign trade in this huge area was to pass through Stockholm. Stockholm thus attained an economic central function comparable to that of Bergen in the west Nordic region. Again like Bergen, it grew into the chief political and administrative centre of the kingdom.

Stockholm's rapid development was not unique in the Mälaren area; it is striking how quickly the high medieval town system was established here before the end of the thirteenth century. One very important reason for this was the geographical proximity to the mining areas of central Sweden, which lay in a ring round Lake Mälaren, and the good communications that were established with them. The towns served as cargo shipment points from land to sea and vice versa, and their exports by way of Lake Mälaren had to pass Stockholm before going further. The Mälaren towns were also situated at roughly equal distances from each other with local hinterlands that could be

reached within a day's journey. Their urban development is marked not least by the thirteenth-century establishment of mendicant houses and by the first traces of urban government. This, too, shows that the town system of the thirteenth century was of a new quality.²⁸

In general, the first decades of the thirteenth century were decisive for the urbanisation of the Baltic region. This is well demonstrated by the vigorous development that was taking place in Lübeck at this time.²⁹ A similar development has been demonstrated archaeologically in other parts of the Baltic, and it is shown not least by the chain of German towns that were established along the southern and eastern shores.

Royal influence was still great in the Swedish towns; they never became autonomous in a continental sense. It was the king who granted urban privileges and controlled the towns through his officials. In towns such as Nyköping, Kalmar and Stockholm important royal castles were built. In Nyköping and Kalmar it is uncertain whether they existed before the built-up settlement. In Stockholm castle and settlement were probably contemporary, though the evidence is obscure. It is at least clear that they were mutually dependent.

The great urban expansion that took place in Denmark and Sweden from the end of the twelfth century had no counterpart in Norway, even if a few new places reached town status there too. Instead, there was a vigorous further development of existing towns such as Trondheim, Oslo, Tønsberg, and above all Bergen. By the latter half of the twelfth century Bergen was already larger and politically more important than any other urban centre in Norway, and in the following century it assumed the role of the first true capital city of the Norwegian kingdom. Over the same period the number of its ecclesiastical institutions surpassed even that of the archiepiscopal see of Trondheim, established in 1152–3.

Bergen's paramount political importance was due to its central position in the maritime-oriented Norwegian realm of the high Middle Ages and, above all, to its rapidly developing function as the great emporium of Norwegian foreign trade. In the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the town gained a virtual monopoly as a port of transshipment between the west Nordic production areas and ports abroad; consequently, it became the centre of a network of smaller towns and trading points to the north and west. In the

28 For this discussion, see Andersson, 'Sverige'; Andrén, 'State and towns in the Middle Ages', pp. 585–609; B. Broberg and M. Hasselmo, 'Urban development in Sweden in the Middle Ages', in Ersgård et al. (eds.), *Rescue and Research*, pp. 19–31.

29 G. P. Fehring (ed.), *25 Jahre Archäologie in Lübeck: Erkenntnisse von Archäologie und Bauforschung zur Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der Hansestadt* (Lübeck, 1988).

years around 1300 Bergen's de facto staple monopoly was confirmed legally by regulations which banned the sailing of foreign ships north of the town and westwards to Iceland and the other colonised islands of the Atlantic.

At that time Hanseatic traders from northern Germany, particularly from Lübeck and other Wendish towns, were in the course of taking over most of Bergen's foreign trade, owing to their superior organisational skill and economic strength. German merchants and ships had been present in Bergen since the latter years of the twelfth century, together with English and other foreign guests. From the late 1250s Germans had started to take up winter residence at Bryggen. These 'winter-sitters' with their common interests sowed the seeds for the Hanseatic trading station or *Kontor* that was finally established in about 1360.³⁰ The role of the Germans in Bergen was at times problematic, not least in relation to the king. A similar situation, although not so extreme, can be detected in Sweden (cf. Chapter 20).

Town and monarchy

The development of Scandinavian towns was closely related to the evolution of more centralised political systems. The early medieval Norwegian towns were, as we have already seen, promoted by the kings, which was an important aspect of the political unification process. From the end of the tenth century the kings had sound strategic reasons for building up bases at just those places where, according to the sagas, they contributed fundamentally to the establishment of towns, for example Trondheim, Bergen, Oslo, Borg (Sarpsborg), Tønsberg and Konghelle. In the high Middle Ages the towns of the kingdom developed further by becoming seats of local and regional administration. Royal castles or fortified estates were built to strengthen the royal presence in the four most important towns of the realm – Bergen, Trondheim, Tønsberg and Oslo – and from the late thirteenth century the treasuries there became the nodal points of royal financial administration. Among these towns we have seen that Bergen played the role as the first real capital of the kingdom, a role shared increasingly with Oslo from the early fourteenth century.

In Sweden and Denmark, likewise, urbanisation was an instrument exploited by central rulers in mastering their kingdoms. What had happened in Sigtuna in the early Middle Ages was followed in many places in high medieval Sweden. The relatively strong urbanisation of central and eastern parts, the growth of towns such as Jönköping, Västervik and Kalmar in Småland, and the

³⁰ Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*.

powerful development of Lödöse are all signs of a central will to control the Swedish kingdom. A reflection of this was the establishment of royal castles in or close to towns in the thirteenth century, such as in Lödöse, Kalmar and Stockholm. In the urban codes of the mid-fourteenth century it was decreed that the castle bailiff should sit on the town council. Royal castle-building, as we have seen, was also an important urbanising factor in high medieval Denmark, and served to strengthen the royal administrative system.

Despite royal influence over the Scandinavian towns, their autonomy was increasing in the high Middle Ages. Special privileges begin to appear among the extant written sources, first in Denmark. Schleswig was given privileges in the mid-twelfth century, which is exceptionally early. In 1202–14 the burghers of Ribe received privileges to pursue trade without market fees or tariffs. Schleswig gained an urban code at the start of the thirteenth century, Tønder in 1243. Hjørring was given the right to use the same *leges forenses* as the burghers of Viborg. As for Svendborg, earlier privileges were reaffirmed in 1253.

Documents of this kind come much later in Sweden. The earliest extant charters, concerning Jönköping at the south tip of Lake Vättern, were issued in 1284. They prohibit rural trading and lay down the exclusive trading right of the town and its burghers. The ban on commercial activities in the countryside was subsequently to be repeated in urban privileges. It was, however, easier to decree than to enforce, as revealed by the fact that it had to be repeated so often. In a subsequent charter of privileges for Jönköping in 1288 there are also special provisions for the government of the town, partly by a council. The special role of the Swedish towns was confirmed by the mid-fourteenth-century urban code of King Magnus Eriksson mentioned above.

In Norway there are indications that the king organised the towns as legal and administrative enclaves as early as the reign of Olaf Kyrre (1067–93), if not earlier. An extant agreement on the rights of Icelanders in Norway, reported to have been concluded in the days of St Olaf, appears to go back at least to the days of his later namesake. Here is mentioned a special town law (*bjarkeyjarréttr*), an urban assembly (*mót*) and a top stratum of townsmen (*húsfastir menn*) engaged in legal proceedings, a system of urban government that must at that time have been operative in Trondheim and perhaps also in Bergen. A royal town bailiff (*gjaldkeri*) may go back just as far but is not documented (in Trondheim) until the start of the twelfth century. The *bjarkeyjarréttr* of Trondheim has been preserved in a version largely representative of the twelfth century and there is mention of a lost west-Norwegian town law (*kaupangsréttr*) which must have applied to Bergen at least as early as that. A new and more extensive urban

code was issued for Bergen in 1276 by King Magnus Law-mender and later applied to other Norwegian towns.

The exclusive urban rights that existed in Norway up to and including the thirteenth century were defined in the urban codes, in royal amendments to them and other law codes, in by-laws issued on royal initiative to supplement the urban code of 1276, in treaties with foreign powers and in privileges for German merchants. Thus a ban on rural trading in Norway was first introduced in a royal decree of 1299. It confirmed the passive trading monopoly of towns in Norway, in the sense that commodities should be brought to them and traded there. The first elements of this monopoly had been introduced some years earlier, together with the principles governing the staple monopoly of Bergen, in Hanseatic privileges. Town privileges in the true sense, issued in royal documents for individual towns, are not known in Norway until the fourteenth century.³¹

Lack of evidence makes it impossible to ascertain whether the early medieval Norwegian system of urban government had parallels in the neighbouring Scandinavian kingdoms. In the course of the thirteenth century there were at any rate great changes in the urban governmental system in Scandinavia. From then on towns generally functioned as legal and administrative enclaves. The most important innovation was the introduction from the south (in Norway possibly also from England) of the town council as a governing body. The council is first mentioned in Denmark in the mid-thirteenth century, the earliest cases being Tønder's law code from 1243 (the Lübeck code transferred) and a privilege for Ribe in 1252. In Norway the urban code of 1276 presupposes a council as functioning in Bergen, and councillors are mentioned by name there in 1284. In Sweden, too, councillors are first mentioned in the 1280s.³²

The introduction of the town council meant that the urban élite was given a greater and more formal role in urban government. But even though the high medieval Scandinavian towns with councils were given a measure of self-government, they were far from having the autonomy enjoyed by many European towns, notably those in northern Italy, north-west Europe and parts of Germany. Through his urban officials the king still played a dominant controlling role, particularly through the castle bailiffs in Sweden and Denmark

31 Helle and Nedkvitne, 'Norge', pp. 250, 263–72; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 8–10, 93.

32 For further details of the high medieval system of town government in Scandinavia, see the national reports in Blom (ed.), *Urbaniseringsprosessen*, 1. For Finland see also C. J. Gardberg, 'Kaupunkilaitos keskiajalla ja uuden ajan alussa', in *Suomen kaupunkilaitoksen historia*, 1 (Helsinki, 1981), pp. 10–49.

and various officials in Norwegian towns; in Bergen the royal urban lawman was the leader of the town council.

It goes without saying that this relationship between monarchy and town was not wholly free of friction. In Denmark, in particular, there are signs of conflict between king and town; in this as in other respects the Danish medieval towns were closer to European models than those of the other two Scandinavian kingdoms. The control of the monarchy over town government seems, on the other hand, to have been at its most effective in Norway.

The townscape

Even if town autonomy was restricted, the burghers could nevertheless assert themselves in various ways, for one by putting their imprint on the physical townscape. One of the clearest manifestations of this in Denmark and Sweden was to build a church of brick, probably inspired from the south. One of the most magnificent examples is St Peter's in Malmö, built in the fourteenth century as an expression of the new status attained by the burghers. Malmö had quickly established itself as one of the most important commercial towns in Denmark, reaching its zenith in the late Middle Ages. Similar churches can also be found in Flensburg, Halmstad, Helsingborg and Ystad, to name just a few examples. In medieval Sweden the churches of Stockholm, Skänninge and Örebro fit this pattern.³³

Secular buildings in most towns were still made of wood, with half-timbering gaining ground in Denmark from the thirteenth century. Building in stone was restricted mainly to churches, monasteries, castles and palaces. Nevertheless, private stone houses were built in some towns, especially in Visby and Stockholm, but also in Danish towns. Much of Visby was built of stone as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century whereas the stone houses of Stockholm are somewhat later. In the archiepiscopal sees of Lund and Uppsala stone houses mainly date from the late Middle Ages and are associated with church dignitaries. Wooden houses predominated in Gamla Lödöse in western Sweden and in all Norwegian towns. In the latter, private stone-building was introduced mostly in the form of late medieval stone cellars, used as cool and fireproof storerooms. In a crude generalisation one could say that townsmen in western Scandinavia – the western parts of Sweden and the whole of Norway – built almost exclusively in wood whereas in eastern

³³ Andrén, *Den urbana scenen*, pp. 44–7.

Sweden and southern Scandinavia there was a much greater element of stone and eventually brick.

Most medieval towns were situated on water-courses and their town plans were clearly adapted to this, and of course to other natural features that impinged on them. Remnants of earlier planning, in the form of parcelling out of plots and the laying out of streets, were developed further in the high Middle Ages. There was a general tendency towards densification, one aspect of which was the building of houses with two or more storeys. In Sweden, at least, there are also indications that the street network was restructured in some cases. The new ecclesiastical topography (one town church) in the newly founded towns has already been mentioned. In addition, there were new features such as mendicant houses in many high medieval towns and occasionally also town halls, although there are few mentions of these; they were connected with the establishment of town councils. In several new towns we have seen that royal castles were important elements.

In general, the medieval Scandinavian towns appear not to have been fortified. Simple fortifications in the form of earth walls with palisades and ditches were, however, not uncommon in Denmark. They were rarer in Sweden and almost non-existent in Norway. More advanced stone walls with towers protected only a few towns, such as Visby, Stockholm and Kalmar in Sweden, and Kalundborg, Vordingborg and København in Denmark. In Visby the wall created a real boundary between town and country, between the interests represented by the burghers on the inside and those of the merchant farmers on the outside. But otherwise the physical boundaries between towns and the surrounding countryside appear to have been generally ill-defined.

The vagueness of boundaries can also be discerned in the terminology. A very common word for town was *villa*, sometimes with the addition of *forensis*. Yet *villa* could also be used of a village. Do these designations reflect a topographical structure that was not always clearly different in the two cases? It should be added that the word *villanus* virtually always denotes the inhabitant of a *villa forensis*, not a villager.³⁴

The 'townless' north

As mentioned above, no proper medieval towns were established in the northern part of the Scandinavian peninsula or in the Norse island communities of

³⁴ Andersson, *Urbanisierte Ortschaften und lateinische Terminologie: Studien zur Geschichte des nordeuropäischen Städtewesen für 1350* (Göteborg, 1971), pp. 88–9, 107–8.

the Atlantic. This does not mean that these areas were unaffected by tendencies towards urbanisation. One of the best-known examples is Vågan in the Lofoten islands of northern Norway. It is worth looking a little more closely at Vågan, not least since it is disputed whether it should be called a town or not.³⁵

According to the later saga tradition Vågan was a chieftain's seat in the tenth century and an economic and military meeting place in the eleventh century. At the beginning of the twelfth century a church was built there and a royal due imposed on people fishing there, indicating that now, if not before, large-scale seasonal cod fishing for stockfish production had started in Lofoten. From the latter half of the century there is reliable information indicating that Vågan was not only an assembly point for fishing fleets in the winter but also a market place for the fish trade, from which large fleets of coastal cargo-vessels carried stockfish and other fish products to Trondheim and increasingly to Bergen. Bergen's monopoly in the north and west Norwegian fish trade developed gradually in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, with Hanseatic merchants coming to dominate fish exports from Bergen from the late thirteenth century. However, the transportation of fish from Vågan remained in Norwegian hands and for some time the annual Vågan market kept its importance as a meeting place for producers and middlemen in the fish trade centred on Bergen. There are also details of other trade in Vågan, especially furs, which emphasises the role of the place as a contact point in east-west trade.

The efforts of the high medieval Norwegian monarchy to control trade and eventually to tie it to the towns had consequences for Vågan, which developed into the chief centre of exchange in northern Norway. This function was clearly waning by 1384, threatened by trading, not least by Bergeners, in fjords and fishing villages elsewhere in the region. A royal decree of that year tried to uphold the trading monopoly of Vågan, Trondheim, Veøy and Borgund in their respective north and west Norwegian regions. Vågan was expressly called one of the 'small towns' (*smaar kauptader*) which had long had their own jurisdictional areas (*thagmarcka*), meaning that they were legal enclaves subject to urban law.

There can thus be little doubt that Vågan as a trading centre in 1384 was treated formally on a par with towns further south in Norway, and that it had

35 Recent surveys of Vågan's history in the light of the archaeological excavations carried out there are R. Bertelsen and P. Urbańczyk, 'Two perspectives on Vågan in Lofoten: Northern perspectives on urbanism', *Acta Borealia*, 1/2 (1988), pp. 98–110; P. Urbańczyk, *Medieval Arctic Norway* (Warsaw, 1992). See also Helle and Nedkvitne, 'Norge', pp. 215, 249–50; N. Bjørge, 'Vågastemna i mellomalderen', in *Hamarspor: Eit festskrift til Lars Hamre* (Oslo, 1982), pp. 45–60.

held this position for quite a long time prior to this. It is not certain, however, whether the place was permanently settled and had achieved a complex centrality that fulfilled the urban criteria put forward above. The central functions of Vågan are documented by archaeological as well as written material, and these were not only economic. Vågan was also the site of an important public assembly or *thing* with both legal and political functions; in addition, important ecclesiastical meetings occurred there, and local magnates in the service of the Crown were linked to the place. No doubt, then, Vågan attained a complex centrality in the course of the high Middle Ages, but judging by the available archaeological evidence it did not have a permanent, year-round settlement. Consequently, the archaeologists who have conducted the recent excavations in Vågan are reluctant to award the place the true character of a town. There were nevertheless clear tendencies towards urbanisation in high medieval Vågan, reflecting the general course of urbanisation in contemporary Scandinavia.

In the fifteenth century Vågan definitively lost its importance as a market centre and the place disappears from the written sources. There is archaeological evidence that it continued to exist in some form, but hardly as more than an ordinary fishing station. In its heyday it had lain at the intersection of two cultural currents, an older one running east–west and a younger one running south–north. The former brought a much older tradition of circumpolar communications and contacts while the latter brought from Bergen centralist Norwegian impulses as well as European contacts, particularly economic ones.

Vågan was not the only place that experienced urbanising tendencies under the influence of Bergen. The same holds true for the west Norwegian ‘small towns’ of Veøy, Borgund and Kaupanger. Bergen’s factual staple monopoly from the thirteenth century also included the tributary Norse island communities in the west, which was confirmed legally at the start of the fourteenth century. Consequently, seasonal trading points in Iceland were added to the commercial satellites of Bergen. It was in this fashion that the high medieval urbanisation movement affected Iceland, but there was no place here that in the course of the Middle Ages came anywhere near the factual or formal status of a town. Instead, a central area system of the type described above seems to have taken care of the functions that elsewhere in Scandinavia led to the establishment of towns.³⁶

An example of urbanising tendencies from northernmost Sweden may also be mentioned: the settlement of Kyrkbyn, just north of the river of Piteå, dated

³⁶ H. Þorláksson, ‘Island’.

to the early fourteenth century. Kyrkbyn was situated on the coast and has been seen as a stage in the establishment of the Swedish kingdom and Church in the area (cf. Chapter 8(e)). In that sense it may have had a function not unlike that of Vågan, though Vågan developed much further than Kyrkbyn did. Similar settlements existed at the estuaries of many rivers in northern Sweden where the isostatic uplift has made it possible to follow the sequences of their development. In several cases the last stage is a town founded in the late Middle Ages or later.

Hietaniemi in the Tornio valley has a different origin. The place appears to have had a distinct role in east–west trade, whereas it is more difficult to fit it into a pattern dominated by north–south links.³⁷

Even though the northernmost and westernmost parts of Scandinavia saw no establishment of medieval towns in the true sense they were not untouched by the general urbanisation movement of the high Middle Ages. The growth of trade and the emergence of state-like Scandinavian kingdoms in that period brought urbanising tendencies in peripheral regions as well.

³⁷ T. Wallerström, *Norrbotten, Sverige och medeltiden: Problem kring makt och bosättning i en europeisk periferi* (Stockholm, 1995), particularly part 2, pp. 79–90, 109–30.

PART IV

*

THE HIGH MEDIEVAL
KINGDOMS

Towards nationally organised systems of government

(a) Introductory survey

KNUT HELLE

The main tendencies in the development of Scandinavian political organisation in the high Middle Ages were centralisation and growth of public authority under the monarchy, the Church, and the secular aristocracy. As a result the three Nordic kingdoms grew into more state-like entities. This chapter outlines their development until 1319, when the first of the Nordic unions was established between Norway and Sweden and the death of King Erik Menved ushered in the temporary disintegration of the Danish kingdom.

Political developments in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries can most easily be followed in Norway and Iceland, thanks to the rich Norse-Icelandic historiography comprising vernacular sagas and political literature dealing with contemporary or near-contemporary events. It should also be noted that Norwegian provincial laws and the law of the Icelandic Free State, *Grágás*, are known in redactions that are earlier than extant Danish and Swedish law-texts; they may largely be said to be representative of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and seem to contain provisions going back to the earliest recording of laws in Norway in the eleventh century and in Iceland in the early twelfth century. In Norway extensive royal legislation followed from the mid-thirteenth century, resulting in the monumental national law-codes of King Magnus 'Law-mender' from the 1270s, which were also adapted to Icelandic conditions, and a relative wealth of royal decrees issued by his sons.

There is also narrative evidence for the history of the Danish kingdom for most of the twelfth century, notably in the *Roskilde Chronicle* (Chapter 6) and the later Latin works of Sven Aggesen and Saxo Grammaticus, and for the thirteenth century contemporary annals become important. Whereas few Norwegian or Swedish documents earlier than the late thirteenth century have survived, even as copies, Danish documents of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are not so rare. The recording of Danish laws, however, does not seem

to have started until the late twelfth century, much later than in Norway and Iceland, and very little is preserved from before 1200. When laws were recorded much earlier in Norway and Iceland than in Denmark (and Sweden) it was probably in large part due to the fact that the art of writing in the vernacular developed earlier in the west Nordic region thanks to English influence in the early stages of Christianisation.

In Sweden there are few documents, no annals or chronicles, and no written codes of law before 1250, and written evidence for high medieval conditions in Finland is almost non-existent. The late start of contemporary written evidence reflects the fact that Sweden was behind the neighbouring kingdoms of Denmark and Norway in the process of territorial unification and the development of a centralised political organisation. The history of Sweden as a European high medieval kingdom thus hardly begins before the mid-thirteenth century and will for the same reason be followed past 1319, to the downfall of the dynasty of the Folkungs in the 1360s. Political organisation in Iceland will be treated for the whole of the 'Norwegian Age', from the early 1260s when the Icelanders placed themselves under the Norwegian crown to about 1400.

Centralising tendencies started to make themselves more strongly felt over most of Scandinavia from the second half of the twelfth century. Danish struggles over the succession to the throne from the 1130s to the 1150s were followed by the strong and expansionist 'Valdemarian' monarchy (1157–1241) which once more made Denmark the leading kingdom in Scandinavia. In Norway succession disputes left their mark on a much longer period, from the 1130s to 1240; the Norwegian church was, however, centralised under the archbishop of Trondheim in 1152–3 and in the following decades the first steps were taken towards a nationally organised system of government.

In Sweden the period c. 1130–1250 was dominated by the contending Sverkerian and Erikian dynasties, but a separate Swedish church province was established under the archbishop of Uppsala in 1164 and from the late twelfth century there were clearer tendencies towards a common monarchy for *Götar* and *Svear* (Chapter 8(e)). In Iceland the centralising trend took the form of growing territorial lordships (*ríki*) in the hands of a few leading families (Chapter 8(d)).

As the Norwegian Civil Wars ebbed out in the first half of the thirteenth century a strong and united monarchy was established under kings of the Sverre family, who came to rule a 'Norwegian dominion' (ON *Noregsveldi*) consisting of mainland Norway and the 'tributary lands' (ON *skattlond*) from Greenland to Orkney, until 1266 together with the Hebrides and the Isle of Man. Iceland's incorporation in the Norwegian realm brought peace and greater

unity after the bitter power struggles which dominated the last decades of the Free State period. The Swedish kingdom was consolidated under the dynasty of the Folkungs from 1250. In Denmark, however, the death of King Valdemar II in 1241 started a period of political unrest, due to the contending claims of his sons and their descendants to the throne and a series of violent conflicts between the Crown and Church. Consequently, the Danish kingdom was now weakened in relation to the neighbouring powers, and both Norwegian and Swedish rulers tried to take advantage of this situation.

Ideologically, Scandinavian kingship entered a new phase in the high Middle Ages, reflected by the introduction of royal unction and coronation, in Norway in 1163 or 1164, in Denmark in 1170, and in Sweden in 1210 at the latest. Through this ceremony the king was put above other leading men as the holder of a divine office in which his first duties, according to the Augustinian–Gregorian ideology of the official documents connected with the first Norwegian coronation, were to uphold justice and protect the Church. From the same time St Olaf came to figure as the ideal *rex iustus* (just king) and Norwegian monarchs exploited his popularity by presenting themselves as his true successors. The same ideology had earlier been promoted in the Odense literature on the Danish St Knud (Chapter 8(b)) but his cult and that of St Erik in Sweden did not acquire the same political importance as St Olaf's in Norway; nor does it appear that the cult of King Valdemar I's father Knud Lavard, canonised in 1170, was in the long run politically significant. Nevertheless, in Denmark and Sweden the cults of royal saints must also have contributed to the monarchy's higher standing in the popular mind.

In Norway laws of succession from 1260 made kingship hereditary in accordance with the exalted ideology of kingship set out in the *King's Mirror* from the 1250s (see Chapter 14) where the king appears as 'chosen by God' and not expressly responsible to any human authority. In Denmark and Sweden monarchs sought to secure hereditary succession by designating their sons as successors, but the rights of royal descendants remained to some extent limited by the right of the *landsthings* to approve a new king and it was the elective principle that came to dominate towards the end of the high Middle Ages, with the council of the realm as the electing body.

Legislation was an important aspect of high medieval royal centralisation. There may have been early royal initiatives in provincial *thing* legislation in all the Scandinavian kingdoms, in Norway at least from the days of St Olaf and probably from the reign of Håkon the Good in the mid-tenth century. A new phase, however, was reached when the monarchy started to formulate written provisions with the intention of having them approved all over the

kingdom, and worked to strengthen its legislative influence in relation to the traditionally law-enacting *things*, in the end claiming authority to make laws.

Peace regulations after a European pattern, inspired by the Church, were particularly important in clearing the way for royal legislation. Such regulations were later ascribed to the Danish St Knud, but we are on safer ground with the Norwegian peace provisions promoted by the Crown and Church in the 1160s and in 1189–90. The Danish king Knud IV was the first Scandinavian monarch who, in 1200, issued peace regulations with express reference to his legislative authority. The Norwegian king Håkon Håkonsson followed suit in 1260 and about the same time the first Swedish peace legislation was promulgated by the regent Earl Birger. An important further step was taken when complete law-codes, including royal decrees on peace and other matters, were given official status by the king. This first happened in Denmark at the very end of the Valdemarian Age, in 1241, when King Valdemar II issued a new Law of Jylland (*Jyske lov*). In Sweden the Law of Uppland was confirmed in the name of the young King Birger Magnusson in 1296. In the meantime the extensive revision of the Norwegian provincial laws, started by King Håkon Håkonsson in 1260, had resulted in the national law-codes for country and town promulgated by his son Magnus Law-mender in the 1270s. Sweden reached the same stage in the mid-fourteenth century whereas Denmark did not receive a national law-code until 1683.

Royal legislation was part of the more comprehensive public justice which emerged in the course of the high Middle Ages, maintained by the Church in its own field but above all by the monarchy. Again, the Norwegian development is the easiest one to follow. In the law-codes of King Magnus Law-mender the king is presented as the highest judge in the land, set 'above the law' with the right and duty of clarifying and supplementing it in individual instances; this is actually the theoretical basis of his legislative authority. The 1270s saw the completion of the development, started in earnest in the 1160s, of a strict official penal system by which breaking the law was not only subject to punishment in the forms of fines and outlawry with the confiscation of property; the monarchy also took upon itself much of the duty of proceeding against law-breakers and ensuring their punishment. This replaced an earlier penal system in which society had taken a comparatively neutral stance, leaving the injured parties to seek redress. Under the influence of Roman and universal Canon Law there was a breakthrough for the principle of individual guilt at the cost of the collective responsibility of kin still present in the earlier provincial laws. This led to the abolition of blood vengeance and the collective obligation and right of kin to pay and receive private compensation in consequence

of homicide. Parallel with the development of official punishment came its antithesis, the royal prerogative of mercy. The king could for a price give outlaws the right to reside freely in the kingdom. Altogether, upholding the law became the most important source of income for the king and his representatives. It strengthened his power and contributed more than anything else to his standing in the eyes of his subjects.

Developments along parallel lines took place in the other Scandinavian kingdoms but are more difficult to follow. An early common feature in all three kingdoms, evidenced by the provincial law-texts, was that the king developed a right to fines not only for violation of his own rights but also for breaches of the general legal order; the peace of the land thus became the king's peace. The earliest evidence for this is the claim of St Knud, in his charter of 1085, that an outlaw should buy his peace from the king. In Denmark and Sweden, as in Norway, the king had in the late thirteenth century reached the position of supreme judge. In Denmark political unrest and strong aristocratic opposition after 1241 prevented the king from establishing a monopoly of force and completely banning feuds and blood vengeance. Generally, it appears that the king's executive obligations and powers within the system of public justice did not develop as far in Denmark and Sweden as it did in Norway.

We have seen that in all three kingdoms the king as military leader had at his disposal a naval levy for which the population provided ships and crews, food and weapons. In Denmark and Sweden this conscripted force lost its military function in the thirteenth century, giving way to heavily armed cavalry and the building of strongholds as centres of defence and control over the surrounding countryside. Royal castle-building seems to have started in all three kingdoms in the latter half of the twelfth century and increased significantly in Denmark and Sweden from the latter part of the thirteenth century. Cavalry came into use in Denmark in the first and in Sweden in the second half of that century. In Norway royal castle-building was restricted to the main royal residential towns and border areas. Due to the fractured topography of the country and the importance of maritime communications along the coast and across the sea to the tributary lands in the west the naval levy remained militarily important until the early fourteenth century. Cavalry was never of much use in medieval Norway, but in 1273 there was an attempt to create a more professional armed force as a supplement to the service of the royal *hirð*, which was mainly on foot and in the fleet.

To pay for this development of military technology the monarchy in all three kingdoms strove to convert the contributions of the population to the naval levy into permanent taxes on land. The chronology of the commutation

process, which started in the twelfth century, is uncertain, but it was completed in the second half of the thirteenth century. In Denmark and Sweden magnates of the old aristocracy and smaller landowners who took upon themselves royal service on horseback, had their land, including tenant farms, exempted from regular royal taxation. *Leidang* taxation in Norway was more lenient since the king's right to a full levy with ships' crews in times of war remained, but personal tax exemption together with one or two retainers was granted to members of the *hirð* whose duty it was to serve the king whenever needed. In this way, a privileged noble class emerged in all three kingdoms towards the end of the thirteenth century.

Together, the Crown, the Church and the privileged nobility now constituted a more distinct ruling élite than the Nordic societies had seen before. It should, however, be noted that the power balance between king and aristocracy was not the same in all three kingdoms. In Denmark, royal power was limited by a strong aristocratic opposition in the second half of the thirteenth century, and in Sweden, too, the aristocracy had a private power basis which enabled it to counterbalance the monarchy of the Folkungs. In Norway, on the other hand, where there was less exploitable land, the ecclesiastical and lay aristocracy was less numerous and did not have the economic resources to control society to the same degree as their counterparts in Denmark and Sweden. The Norwegian *hirð* aristocracy was very dependent on the income and status received through royal service so that the building-up of a comparatively strong national royal administration was in its interest. This goes a long way to explain why relations between the Crown and the secular aristocracy after the end of the Civil Wars were remarkably harmonious as seen from a Scandinavian or European perspective.

As regards royal political organisation in the strict sense the high Middle Ages saw the emergence of an administrative and governmental apparatus for the whole kingdom, both locally and centrally. In the latter part of the period local administration in Denmark and Sweden was concentrated in strongholds from which royal representatives controlled the surrounding countryside and collected dues which went towards the upkeep of the strongholds and their personnel and of the royal power in general. In Norway the royal castles in the four main towns acquired a superior regional function in relation to a more fine-meshed national network of local royal officials (ON *sýslumenn*) with fixed administrative districts.

Centrally, the leading royal household posts, in the general European fashion, were the points of departure for the development of administrative offices. At the same time the monarchy convened larger assemblies with a nationwide

participation (Danish *danehof*, Norw. *riksmøter*, Swedish *herredagar*) for consultation and consent in matters of outstanding political importance, particularly national legislation and decisions concerning the succession to the throne. Such meetings are known in Norway and Denmark from the latter half of the twelfth century and grew more common in the following century. Chronologically, they belong to the period when the originally feudal councils of western Europe developed into more representative bodies, increasingly denoted by the term *parlamentum*, which was also used in Scandinavia. The Danish and Swedish assemblies remained purely aristocratic bodies with no regular attendance of others apart from prelates and magnates, and could also, particularly in Denmark, function as organs of opposition to the monarchy. In Norway, where there was also an attempt to add a national representation of peasants from local districts, the assemblies generally served the interests of both Crown and Church.

The most fundamental difference between Scandinavian royal assemblies and west European parliaments is that the former never became permanent political institutions. They did not in the late Middle Ages develop into a system of general estates, as was the case on the European continent, or into a unique institution like the English Parliament. Geographical conditions go a long way to explain why larger central assemblies were not thoroughly institutionalised in medieval Scandinavia. They did not gain the right to consent to, or refuse, extraordinary taxation or to exercise extensive and regular judicial functions.

When from the latter part of the high Middle Ages the need arose for more regular consultative and sanctioning national bodies, parliaments or estates were not used. An alternative solution was more practical and desirable for kings as well as for the Church and the secular aristocracy. In the course of the thirteenth century royal counsellors were consulted more regularly and from the 1280s a more institutionalised royal council appears in all three kingdoms. It was these more restricted consultative bodies of royal officials, magnates and bishops that developed into the first true decision-making institutions alongside Scandinavian kings, the 'council of the realm' as they were called in both Norway and Sweden from 1319 and later also in Denmark.

When trying to explain the centralising tendencies that led to more state-like kingdoms in high medieval Scandinavia the importance of the European influences which have been partly indicated above should not be underestimated. The higher clergy in Scandinavia were part of an international educated élite; many of them studied in European universities as did also some of the men who later became prominent lay magnates in royal service. The expansionist policies of the Scandinavian kingdoms in the Baltic, towards north Germany,

and the Atlantic islands led to more active foreign relations and from the latter half of the twelfth century diplomatic contacts between Scandinavian courts and the power centres of Europe generally grew to become quite close in the thirteenth century. It was thus natural that kings and leading members of the Church and secular aristocracy consciously tried to mould political organisation and ideology in their homelands on more advanced European models.

At the same time fundamental structural changes in the Scandinavian societies may have given impetus to more centralised political organisations. The growth of population eventually had negative economic consequences for the lower strata of society, but it was probably instrumental in bringing about the fully developed tenancy system which constituted the main economic basis of the high medieval ruling élite. After the ebb of Viking expansion in the eleventh century, kings and magnates had to live largely off their countries' own resources, and without land rents they would not have been able to devote their attention to war, politics and courtly life to the degree that they did. Landed property, farmed by tenants, was also the chief source of income of the Church which itself contributed very significantly to social cohesion and centralisation – by its unifying religious influence, by its hierarchically and nationally organised systems of administration, and by supplying the kings with able advisers, professional administrative helpers and an effective political ideology.

In recent research attention has also been drawn to military specialisation as an important factor in the development of the high medieval kingdoms. Dynastic struggles in all three kingdoms and the Swedish and Danish activities in the Baltic and north Germany fostered a military élite with the power, under royal leadership, to compel the peasant populations to pay taxes and in other ways submit to growing public authority, especially in Denmark and Sweden where peasants ceased to be militarily important in the thirteenth century. It is hardly an accident that Norwegian peasants, who throughout the same century kept their military function in the naval levy, were less affected by this type of exploitation than their contemporaries in Denmark and the central parts of Sweden.

12 (b) The Danish kingdom: consolidation and disintegration

INGE SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN

The killing of Knud Lavard, son of King Erik Ejegod, in January 1131 (see Chapter 8(b)) started a period of dynastic strife in Denmark. Fighting went on until 1157 when Knud Lavard's son Valdemar I, 'the Great', became sole ruler. His reign and those of his two sons, Knud IV (1182–1202) and Valdemar II 'the Victorious' (1202–41), constitute the so-called Valdemarian age of Danish medieval history. This was the period when a high medieval kingdom of European type emerged, consolidated by an ordered succession to the throne, by crusades against the Slavs, and by subjugation of the land north of the river Elbe. In spite of a planned coup against Valdemar I and a rebellion against the influential Archbishop Absalon (1177–1202) domestic affairs prospered due to stable government and active legislation.

In 1223 Valdemar II and his eldest son were taken prisoners by the German count of Schwerin and had to pay a huge ransom. This was a crushing blow to the Danish expansionist policy which finally ended when Valdemar lost the battle of Bornhøved in Holstein against a north German coalition in 1227. He was forced to relinquish all conquests in Germany with the exception of the island of Rügen which had come to Denmark in the days of Valdemar I. Valdemar II also managed to keep Estonia which he had conquered in 1219. The rest of his reign he spent consolidating his kingdom.

The century following Valdemar II's death in 1241 saw great political unrest. His sons and their descendants fought against each other. To this was added a violent conflict between the Crown and Church under Archbishop Jacob Erlandsen (1254–74) which continued under his successors. Generally, the political disturbances led to disintegration; the Danish kingdom was weakened in relation to the neighbouring powers in Scandinavia and north Germany.¹

¹ For Danish history c. 1150–1320, see A. E. Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', in A. E. Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 1 (København, 1977), pp. 211–399; K. Hørby,

The royal power in twelfth-century historiography

The *Roskilde Chronicle* from the 1140s divides the kings in the period following Sven Estridsen's death in 1074 into a 'white' group, consisting of mild and just kings such as Harald Hen, Oluf and Niels, and a 'black' group with the coercive St Knud as the leading figure. On the other hand, Saxo Grammaticus in his monumental *Gesta Danorum* from the beginning of the thirteenth century prefers centralising and militant kings, not only Knud but also Erik Ejegod and his son Erik Emune (1134–7). The contrast between the *Roskilde Chronicle* and Saxo seems to reflect a serious political conflict in twelfth-century Denmark, between the old magnates' families who sought to protect their traditional rights and a new, more effective, and ruthless royal power of which St Knud was an early representative.

Before 1900 Danish historians largely accepted Saxo's tale of the sons of Sven Estridsen, but in the early twentieth century he was exposed to radical source criticism by the Swedish historians Lauritz and Curt Weibull and their followers. They accepted the *Roskilde Chronicle's* view of the kings for which they also found support in their interpretation of the contemporaneous kings' list in the *Necrologium Lundense*. New studies from the 1980s have, however, eliminated the sharp distinction between the white and black flocks of kings.²

One of the bones of contention is the second Nordic archbishop, Eskil (1138–78), who is thought to have inspired the author of the *Roskilde Chronicle*. While his predecessor Asser was highly appreciated during most of his term of office (1104–37) Eskil was more controversial. Nobody could deny his competence or his zeal but his Gregorian views made his relations with the kings difficult; he was a vigorous spokesman for *libertas ecclesiae*, the freedom of the Church from secular influence, and acknowledged only the authority of the pope.

Eskil quarrelled with several Danish kings: 'I am more used to command than to obey', Saxo makes him say. His relationship with Valdemar I was particularly dramatic. In the first years of Valdemar's reign they cooperated in founding monasteries and raiding pagan Slavonia, but then there was an open breach and Eskil left his see for most of the 1160s. The conflict was caused by

'Middelalderen', in N. Lund and K. Hørby, *Samfundet i vikingetid og middelalder 800–1500* (*Dansk social historie*, 2, København, 1980), pp. 33–313; O. Fenger, *Kirker rejses alle vegne* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, 4, København, 1989); K. Hørby, *Velstands krise og tusind baghold* (ibid., 5, København, 1989).

2 L. Weibull, 'Necrologierna från Lund, Roskildekrönikan och Saxo: Grunddrag i Danmarks historia under det 12. århundradet', *Scandia*, 1 (1928), pp. 84–112; C. Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus: Regnum og sacerdotium i Danmark 1050–1170* (København, 1982); cf. Chapter 13.

the papal schism from 1159, during which Eskil was a staunch supporter of the Gregorian Pope Alexander III while Valdemar at first found it necessary to accommodate Emperor Frederic Barbarossa and his antipope; in 1162 he was humiliated by having to swear fealty to the emperor. When Valdemar changed his allegiance in the papal schism the way was open for a reconciliation with Eskil. The archbishop led the great church festival in Ringsted in 1170 when Valdemar's father, Knud Lavard, was canonised and Valdemar's eldest son, Knud IV, was crowned as his future successor to the throne.

Four years later, when Eskil was abroad and staying in Clairvaux, his grandsons took part in an uprising against the king together with rejected pretenders. Although Eskil was not involved he asked the pope for permission to resign from his see. The pope consented and allowed him to appoint his successor. He chose Absalon, then bishop of Roskilde, who was a close friend of King Valdemar and had participated in the crusade against the Slavs. 'He was just as much a Viking as a bishop', Saxo says.

In the course of the twentieth century historians' conception of Danish society in the high Middle Ages has changed considerably. In the first part of the century this was thought to have been an egalitarian society of free farmers.³ Later, historians have come to realise that there was great economic and social inequality, reflected by the control of landed property, by church-building, and even by the contemporary history-writing. In the eyes of the *Roskilde Chronicle* the clergy was foreign and weak and needed help from a strong kingship, but in fact most of the bishops and a growing part of the other clergy were Danish and belonged to prominent families. Danish society was definitely not democratic in the high Middle Ages. Most of the population were tenants or cottagers under ecclesiastical and secular magnates whose estates in that period became exempt from taxation.

Beside the kings it is on this upper stratum that the main medieval works of history concentrate: the *Roskilde Chronicle*, Sven Aggesen's *Historia brevis regum Daniae*, and Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. Sven's short history begins with the legendary tale of King Skjold and his offspring, the *Skjoldunger*, pieced together from various sources, and then follows the familiar royal genealogy from Gorm the Old. Here and there Sven declares himself incapable of writing a coherent story due to lack of sources. Besides, he says, his *contubernalis* (comrade) Saxo has been ordered by Archbishop Absalon to write the history of the last hundred years. Nevertheless, Sven continued his story up to 1184 just as Saxo did. The connection between the two works is obvious but there are also differences.

³ See particularly E. Arup, *Danmarks historie*, 1 (København, 1925); H. Koch, *Danmarks Kirke i den begyndende Højmiddelalder*, 1 (København, 1936).

For one thing Absalon is not so prominent a figure in Sven's account as he is in Saxo's.⁴

Saxo set to work before 1202 and stopped after 1214.⁵ He wrote at the instigation of Archbishop Absalon who died in 1201, and then dedicated his work to Absalon's successor Anders Sunesen. Absalon had asked Saxo to write the history of the Danes in a way comparable to the best European chronicles, which he did, using Roman and medieval history-writing as models.⁶ Like Sven Aggesen he starts his history with a legendary king, Dan, at the time when Rome was founded. Roman Christianity forms the background and Danish kingship the foreground of *Gesta Danorum*. The political ideal is an equal cooperation between monarchy and Church.⁷

Legislative activity

In *Gesta Danorum* the kings from Skjold to Knud VI make the laws but this is partly legendary and for the rest of limited historical value. A more concrete instance of royal lawmaking is referred to when the *Vederlag*, the law of the royal *lið* or *hirð* (cf. Chapter 8(b)), is said – by Sven Aggesen and a late medieval vernacular version of the law – to have been written down by King Knud IV and Archbishop Absalon who rendered what it had been in the days of King Knut the Great. The hagiographic texts of Odense also mention a royal edict with punitive provisions issued by St Knud in order to ensure the observance of holy days and periods of fasting.⁸

However, it was not until the Valdemarian age that there was a significant development of royal initiative in legislation. It is not unthinkable that the *Vederlag* in its extant form is a product of the combined historiographic and legal interests which at the end of the twelfth century were working towards

4 The works of Sven Aggesen have been published by M.Cl. Gertz in *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii ævi*, 1 (København, 1917) and translated into English by E. Christiansen, *The Works of Sven Aggesen: Twelfth-Century Danish Historian* (London, 1992).

5 J. Olrik and H. Ræder (eds.), *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, 1 (København, 1931). English translations by P. Fisher with a commentary by H. E. Davidson, *Saxo Grammaticus: History of the Danes, Books I–IX*, 1–2 (Cambridge, 1979–80); E. Christiansen, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 1–3 (Oxford, 1980).

6 K. Friis-Jensen, *Saxo as Latin Poet* (Rome, 1987); L. B. Mortensen, 'Saxo Grammaticus' view of the origin of the Danes', *Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen Âge Grec et Latin*, 55 (Copenhagen, 1987), pp. 169–83.

7 K. Johannesson, *Saxo Grammaticus: Komposition och världsbild i Gesta Danorum* (Stockholm, 1978); B. Strand, *Kvinnor och män i Gesta Danorum* (Göteborg, 1981); I. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Da tidernes herre var nær: Studier i Saxos historiesyn* (København, 1987).

8 O. Fenger, 'Laws', in Ph. Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1993), pp. 383–4.

a more active royal part in the lawmaking. The first known Nordic decree expressly given by royal authority alone was issued by King Knud IV in 1200: an edict for Skåne on manslaughter. The king asserted his right to make and change the law but at the same time prepared the way for his edict by presenting it as a re-establishment of the old law. The following decades saw new royal decrees, such as the one on ordeal by iron in 1216.⁹

Royal edicts for the maintenance of peace were, however, very different from the comprehensive provincial laws and church laws. The church laws for Sjælland and Skåne from the 1170s¹⁰ are formulated as contracts between the inhabitants of each diocese and its bishop (Bishop Absalon and Archbishop Eskil, respectively), without a trace of a royal initiative. The laws deal with the election of parish priests, legal proceedings and punishments, and differ from Canon Law in accordance with the wishes of the parishioners; formerly, it is said, 'the law had been too hard'. In return, the clergy asked for and were given all the bishop's tithe. Tithes had been introduced in the Danish kingdom by about 1100 but apparently with a fixed annual gift instead of the full bishop's part. Generally, the people wanted less, the clergy more of provisions from Canon Law. In 1180, when Absalon had become archbishop, there was an uprising in Skåne against the new church law, especially the bishop's tithe.

It was not only the Church and its laws that were administered regionally, diocese for diocese. There were also separate laws and jurisdictions for the provinces or lands of Skåne (with Halland, Blekinge and Bornholm), Sjælland (with the islands to the south) and Jylland (with Fyn and the surrounding small islands).¹¹ It appears that, with the exception of the new Law of Jylland (*Jyske lov*) which was issued by King Valdemar II in 1241, these laws were normally prepared and formulated by the *landsthings* which were dominated by the local magnates.

No extant manuscripts of the provincial laws are older than about 1250 and most of them date from the fourteenth century and later. The versions copied appear to have been recorded between 1200 and 1241, when the Law of Jylland, the youngest of the surviving provincial codes, was promulgated. The chronological order of the provincial laws is uncertain, not least because of mutual loans. In its extant form the Law of Skåne appears to have been written down in the days of Archbishop Andreas Sunesen (1202–23) who made a Latin

9 On Danish peace legislation, see O. Fenger, *Fejde og mandebod: Studier over slægtsansvaret i germansk og gammeldansk ret* (København, 1971).

10 T. Damsgaard Olsen, 'Omkring kirkelovenes tilblivelse', in *Festskrift til Kristian Hald* (København, 1974), pp. 515–23.

11 Published together with the church laws by J. Brøndum-Nielsen and P. J. Jørgensen, *Danmarks gamle Landskabslove med Kirkelovene*, 1–8 (København, 1932–61).

paraphrase of it. The preserved redactions of laws for Sjælland seem to have been recorded after the Law of Skåne but parts of them were probably adopted already in the latter part of the twelfth century. The Law of Jylland, too, may have had a predecessor from the same period. It appears that the recording of provincial laws and church laws started in the days of King Valdemar I and Archbishop Absalon,¹² manifesting the strong legal interest of the Valdemarian Age. Well into the twentieth century it was thought that the old Nordic laws were relics of ancient Germanic legal ideas but that is no longer a tenable view. Like other Nordic provincial laws the Danish were obviously arranged and written down by clerically trained scribes at a comparatively late date; we have seen, though, that this happened earlier in Norway and Iceland than in Denmark and Sweden.

In general the Danish provincial laws have similar contents, although the order of provisions differ. They are mostly concerned with domestic affairs, inheritance and criminal law, and contain important information on themes such as marriage, agriculture and social groups. For example, the fact that tenants were admitted to the *landsting* at Ringsted in Sjælland but not to its counterpart at Viborg in Jylland suggests that tenancy may have been more widespread in Sjælland than in Jylland. These laws also reflect a patriarchal society in which male guardians protected the persons and fortunes of women.

The law-texts imply that kings had a minor role in provincial lawmaking. The king's opinion is mentioned occasionally but it does not appear to have had any precedence, and his deputies were not superior to the other participants in the *landstings*. On the other hand, it should be remembered that most of the magnates had sworn allegiance to the king and that the provincial laws secured him the right to fines for certain violations of law and order. He was, for example, assigned a part of the fine for homicide together with the victim's paternal and maternal kin and he received the full payment when an outlaw bought his peace, a right already claimed by St Knud in 1085 (Chapter 8(b)).

The legislative role of the *landstings* continued throughout the high Middle Ages, but less independently after the development of royal legislation in the Valdemarian Age; after that the role of the provincial assemblies was to ratify such legislation. The first instance of this was when the Law of Jylland was issued by King Valdemar II in 1241. Its magnificent preface, beginning with the famous words 'Meth logh schal land byggæs' (with law shall the land be

12 O. Fenger, 'De øvrige danske landskabslove', in O. Fenger and C. Jansen (eds.), *Jyske lov 750 år* (Viborg, 1991), pp. 37–50; Fenger, 'Laws'.

lived in),¹³ asserts that valid law is given by the king but that it should also be approved by the land, i.e. the *landsting*. Numerous quotations in the preface convey the impression that Canon Law is superior to secular law, and the text may be influenced by a papal injunction in Gregory IX's *Liber extra* from 1234, maintaining that laws have to be written and supported by the royal power. The Law of Jylland may have been planned as a national law but was eventually only promulgated for Jylland; the Danish kingdom, unlike the other Scandinavian kingdoms, did not receive a national law-code in the Middle Ages.

Leding and herremænd

The laws of Jylland and Skåne deal with the *leding* or naval levy in considerable detail.¹⁴ It is mentioned first in St Knud's charter of 1085 where the king reserves to himself the fine paid by those who do not turn up when *leding* (*expedicio*) is called out. It is not known how the levy originally functioned. A little information can be gleaned from twelfth-century diplomas and narratives but there is no description of the *leding* system earlier than the extant versions of the provincial laws. Here the *leding* fleet at the disposal of the king consists of one ship built and furnished by each *skipæn* and manned by peasants from *havner*, each *havne* supplying one man (cf. Chapter 8(b)). There are strict rules for the division of the economic and military burdens among the peasants and the system is supervised by royal 'steersmen' (*styresmænd*), each of them commanding a *leding* ship.

The Law of Jylland describes a military *leding* to which new demands were added. The steersman should be equipped with a crossbow and a man to work it if he was not himself capable of doing it. The king had the right to call up, once in every four years, the levy in full armour and with full provisions. This may reflect a coastguard system that was, according to Saxo, established by King Valdemar and Archbishop Absalon in about 1170; the fleet was then divided into four parts, each of which should keep watch for a quarter of a year. This arrangement has been interpreted as the beginning of a standing force in addition to the *leding*.¹⁵

¹³ The same words can be found in Swedish laws and in contemporaneous Icelandic texts, and bear witness to a common Scandinavian idea.

¹⁴ On the *leding*, see K. Erslev, *Valdemarernes Storhedstid: Studier og Omrids* (København, 1898); E. Arup, 'Leding og ledingsskat i det 13. aarhundrede', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 8:5 (København, 1914–15), pp. 141–237; S. Bolin, *Ledung och frälse: Studier och orientering över danska samfunnsförhållanden under äldre medeltid* (Lund, 1934); N. Lund, *Lid, leding og landeværn: Hær og samfund i Danmark i ældre middelalder* (Roskilde, 1996).

¹⁵ Olrik and Ræder (eds.), *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, XIV, xxxix, 49. See Lund, *Lid, leding og landeværn*, passim.

The *leding* of the provincial laws is, however, not only a military defence system; it is also a system of taxation. Clearly, in the first part of the thirteenth century taxation was gaining the upper hand in relation to the military *leding*. The taxes with which the *leding* provisions in the Law of Jylland are concerned imply that the naval levy had by then lost much of its military function and had been replaced by annual taxation of landed property. The chronology of the commutation of active *leding* service into regular taxation is uncertain. One point of departure was to release people from active service if they paid for it; this would be natural when they lived in places that made it difficult to participate or on farms outside the *leding* system. From the mid-twelfth century there is evidence of a fee called *kversæde* (sitting behind) which was paid in money or provisions in lieu of active service. Sometimes the king might also be interested in the provisions of the *leding* without making use of it as a military force, or he might only want to use the levy from parts of the kingdom. These would also be starting points for a commutation of military obligations into taxation. For a while regular taxation existed in parallel with military use of the *leding* and may have been established as early as the last decade of the twelfth century when King Knud IV and his brother Valdemar subdued the land north of the Elbe.

An addition to the *leding* part of the Law of Skåne shows that taxes in that province were calculated by *havner*. The conditions in Halland are well known from *King Valdemar's Land Register*,¹⁶ which includes a number of lists, the main one dated to 1231 while the others are later. One records the villages and the distribution of land in Halland among 8 *skipæn* and 534 *havner*, with in addition 126 villages exempt from the *leding* as well as heavy taxes on grounds of location or poverty. In the *leding* part of the Law of Jylland the highest rate of assessment for an individual tax-payer is *tredingshavne*, one-third of a *havne*, and the lowest *tolvtingshavne*, one-twelfth of a *havne*. Small farmers were not obliged to pay tax. These provisions clearly reflect a rural society with great social inequalities.

For very rich people active military service could be preferable to paying taxes. They would then venture their necks for the king and the peace of the country, as contemporary usage had it. They bound themselves to serve in full armour whenever called out in return for service pay and tax-exemption for their land. The arrangement was ceremoniously confirmed by the king to whom the 'man' had to swear fealty. In Danish such a man was called

16 S. Aakjær (ed.), *Kong Valdemars Jordebog*, 1–3 (København, 1926–45).

herremænd, meaning either man of the *hær* (army) or man of a *herre* (lord). The group of *herremænd* (pl.) was apparently created as a middle stratum between the *leding* system and the royal *lið* or *hirð* but was eventually fused with the latter. It was in this way that the late medieval Danish nobility was created.¹⁷ Tax exemption eventually extended not only to the *herremænd* himself but also to his tenant farmers, a stage that was probably not reached generally until the latter half of the thirteenth century.

The bishops and lay magnates had their own retinues of commended men who together with their lords were exempted from service in the *leding* ships and from contributions to the *havne*, but they had to serve whenever the *leding* was called up. If they did not, they would have to pay a certain relief-sum according to their landed property (per *bol*, see Chapter 10). If they failed both in their military and fiscal obligations they forfeited their privileges and became taxable peasants owing ordinary *leding* service and dues.

Clerical and lay magnates were supposed to serve the king with their retinues but in periods of strained relations between king and magnates the retinues of the latter posed a threat to the king. This was not least the case when Archbishop Jacob Erlandsen opposed the Crown from 1254 to 1274.¹⁸

The *herremænd* had to obey the rules of the *Vederlag* whose very strict punishments were intended to ensure that the king was served by trustworthy men. Instead of taking revenge the king's men had to pay fines, but some crimes could not be atoned by payment; they were called *orbodemål* (offences for which fines could not be paid). People who committed them were outlawed. The law prescribed that they were to be sent into the forest with a knife and provisions for two days or to sea with oars and a bailer; after twenty-four hours everyone was free to kill them. In the legislation of the Valdemarian Age the number of offences qualifying as *orbodemål* increased in order to further the peace of the land.

The *Danehof* and the king's council

Valdemar I and Knud VI summoned the clerical and lay magnates to occasional meetings in various places just as, according to the *Vederlag*, Knut the Great had convened his housecarls for internal jurisdiction. In the Valdemarian Age

17 A. E. Christensen, *Kongemagt og aristokrati: Epoker i dansk middelalderlig statsopfattelse indtil unionstiden* (København, 1945).

18 N. Skyum-Nielsen, *Kirkekampen i Danmark 1241–1290: Jacob Erlandsen, samtid og eftertid* (København, 1963).

such assemblies could also deal with issues such as warfare, negotiations over crownland, and preparations for legislation. Saxo reports that in 1182 Knud IV consulted the nobility on the island of Samsø on new legislation. The same type of royal assembly met in Vordingborg in March 1241 in order to witness the promulgation of the Law of Jylland. The participants at such meetings were called 'the best men of the realm' (*meliores regni*). They were the princes, the bishops, and a group of magnates which changed according to the king's wishes.

However, the king's freedom of choice was often limited by political and practical considerations. In the troubled period after the death of Valdemar II in 1241 the kings more than before had to seek the support of the magnates of the realm. In the records of the conflict between King Christopher I (1252–9) and Archbishop Jacob Erlandsen it is reported that the king used to summon the magnates to annual meetings or convocations concerning the affairs of the kingdom. In the following reign of King Erik Klipping (1259–86), which started out as a regency headed by the queen dowager, cooperation between monarchy and magnates gave way to a more authoritarian royal policy seeking to enforce the law more rigorously among the upper strata.

A convocation in 1276 accepted King Erik's two-year-old son, Erik Menved, as his successor, but this was opposed by the *marsk* (marshal) Stig Andersen and there was also disagreement about an ordinance on lese-majesty which placed the king's men under more severe criminal jurisdiction than ordinary inhabitants of the realm. This may have made the king reluctant to summon new assemblies in the following years whereas the magnates obviously came to regard them as instruments of their own interests. When a new period of cooperation between monarchy and aristocracy started in the early 1280s the king committed himself to convene annually 'the parliament called *hof*' (court) to discuss matters of political importance and to accept limitations on his judicial and fiscal powers, among other things not to imprison anyone arbitrarily. The pledges were made at a convocation in 1282 and later in the same year were confirmed by Erik Klipping's so-called *håndfæstning* (a written royal obligation to govern in a specified way). This document has been called Denmark's first constitution. In the following years aristocratic assemblies, eventually called the *Danehof* (court of the Danes), became the forum of negotiations between the king and a group of magnates who often opposed him.

After the murder of King Erik Klipping in 1286 a group of guardians for the young King Erik Menved (1286–1319) came into power and supported him against his enemies in the *Danehof*. This seems to have been the beginning of

an institutionalised royal council in Denmark, following a period starting in the 1250s when royal counsellors appear more distinctly than before in contemporary sources. In the course of Erik Menved's reign the *Danehof* declined in significance. From the end of the 1280s it ceased to meet annually, and was of little importance in Erik's later years, whereas the royal council, which can be regarded as the most influential part of the *Danehof*, became an increasingly important political corporation. After Erik's death the council acquired a more independent political role, as indicated by the term 'counsellors of the realm' (*consiliarii regni*). This was the start of a long period, lasting to 1660, when the aristocratic Danish *rigsråd* (council of the realm) was the governing body at the king's side.¹⁹

The murder in Finderup and its aftermath

On the night of St Cecilia (22 November) 1286 King Erik Klipping's life ended in a barn at Finderup in Jylland. According to the *Annals of Ryd* he was murdered by those who loved him most and killed by fifty-six stabs. Other annals repeat the story with less detail. The numerous wounds would seem to indicate several culprits but that is all that is known of the matter.²⁰

Who was behind the killing? At Whitsun 1287 a *Danehof* at the royal castle of Nyborg passed sentence on a group of magnates accused of the murder, almost all of them of noble descent and with royal offices which meant that they had sworn fealty to the king. They were made outlaws without a chance of defence. As the Norwegian king put it later: 'They were not allowed to enjoy the rights of Norway, Denmark, or other countries.' Some of them did not appear at Nyborg as they had sought refuge in Norway where they were formally accepted as the king's liegemen.

The leading outlaws were Count Jacob of Halland, who belonged to the royal family, and Marshal Stig Andersen Hvide. It does not seem probable that they would kill a king whom they were in the position to control. The sentence allowed their enemies to take over: Queen Dowager Agnes of Brandenburg,

19 A. Hude, *Danehoffet og dets Plads i Danmarks Statsforfatning* (København, 1893); Christensen, *Kongemagt og aristokrati*. See also the comparative treatment of medieval royal assemblies and the royal council in K. Helle, *Konge og gode menn i norsk riksstyring ca. 1150–1319* (Bergen, 1972).

20 E. Jørgensen (ed.), *Annales Danici medii aevi* (København, 1920), p. 125. On the murder, its background, and consequences, see H. Yrwing, *Konungamordet i Finderup: Nordiska förvecklingar under senare delen av Erik Klippings regering* (Skrifter utg. av Kungliga Vetenskaps societeten i Lund, 45, Lund 1954); reviewed by N. Skyum-Nielsen, *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 9:5 (København, 1956–59), pp. 357–62.

Duke Valdemar of Schleswig and the *drost* (seneschal) Peder Hoseøl. A poem which predicted the Nyborg sentence, written and performed by the German minnesinger Rumelant, was probably commissioned by the ruling group that became the council of the young King Erik Menved. The feud with the outlaws had far-reaching repercussions in Scandinavian politics (see Chapter 12(e)) and lasted until 1308 when a peace treaty allowed the surviving outlaws to return to their manors.

The attitude of the Norwegian kings Erik Magnusson (1280–99) and his younger brother Håkon V Magnusson (1299–1319) was determined by the descent of their mother, Ingeborg, who was the daughter of the Danish king Erik Plovpenning (1241–50), the eldest son of King Valdemar II. Ingeborg had married the Norwegian co-ruler Magnus Håkonsson, the later Law-mender, in 1261, the year after her sister Sofia had been given in marriage to the Swedish king Valdemar Birgersson (1250–75). The two queens and their two unmarried sisters were heirs to landed property which was to cause much dispute in the following decades.

Valdemar II, following a European pattern, provided for his sons by enfeoffing them with principalities within the kingdom. He had sufficient authority to secure for himself the military and fiscal dues of the *leding* system, but when Erik Plovpenning took over he had difficulty in making his younger brothers comply with his royal commands. He was murdered in 1250 by followers of Valdemar's second son, Duke Abel of Schleswig, who consequently became king (1250–2). The third son, Christopher, had been granted the islands of Lolland and Falster, and succeeded to the throne when Abel was killed in a campaign in 1252.

The latter part of the thirteenth century saw much dispute between the different lines of Valdemar's offspring, not least over the inheritance of Erik Plovpenning's four daughters. When Erik Magnusson became Norwegian king as a minor in 1280 his maternal inheritance consisted of landed property in Jylland. The Norwegian government worked actively to gain advantages from Erik's descent but there is no indication that it was an accessory to the murder of Erik Klipping.

Posterity largely accepted the sentence of 1287. In 1932, however, the historian Erik Arup diverted suspicion from the outlaws to the regents of Erik Menved. In Arup's eyes the *drost* Peder Hoseøl was the chief mover but the scarce source material allows only one person to be found guilty with any certainty, namely Arvid Bentsen, the most ignominious of the outlaws, who was accused of having participated in the murder with his own hands. He received no protection from the Norwegian king and was eventually executed.

Nowadays another suspect is given prominence by several historians: Duke Valdemar Eriksen of Schleswig. He was a grandson of King Abel whose branch had been passed over by his brother Christopher's line in the succession. Abel's family retained the dukedom of Schleswig and constantly sought to exercise royal rights there, including the privilege of minting and the *leding*. Valdemar's relations with the king took a turn for the worse when he was imprisoned in 1285. He was released a few months later but his bitterness remained undiminished. He had a motive for the murder of Erik Klipping and even benefited by it as he became one of the guardians of Erik Menved in 1287.

Jens Grand, elected archbishop against the wish of the royal family in 1289, was later accused of complicity in the murder and imprisoned. He was a member of the Hvide family and a relative of several of the outlaws and also of his predecessor, Jacob Erlandsen. His struggle with the king is well documented by the *Acta processus litium*, a collection of letters, sentences, and minutes of the legal proceedings of the archbishops Jacob Erlandsen, Jens Grand and Esger Juul (1310–25).²¹ In the lawsuit against Jens Grand, King Erik Menved was assisted by his chancellor Mogens Madsen, Martinus de Dacia, a renowned philosopher.

From the outset Jens Grand behaved arrogantly in his relations with the royal house. He resumed the struggle of Jacob Erlandsen to exempt the Church from the obligations of *leding* and other temporal duties. After the murder of Erik Klipping he neither could nor would deny his connections with the outlaws, but declared himself innocent of the crime. In 1294 he was imprisoned by the king's brother, Duke Christopher, but succeeded in escaping after one and a half year's severe incarceration. He appealed to the papal curia and finally, in 1298, obtained a judgement by Pope Boniface VIII which was a setback for the king, who was sentenced to a heavy fine for the sacrilege of laying hands on a cleric and usurping ecclesiastical resources; what is more, the kingdom was placed under interdict. Five years later the papal sentence was modified so that Erik was able to pay the fine. In the meantime Jens Grand had been transferred from Lund to Riga. The improvement in relations between the papacy and the Danish king was in part brought about by a document issued by King Erik and probably composed by Mogens Madsen, in which the king completely submitted to the pope and promised to pay as much as he could. At the same time he declared that he would never again meet Jens Grand who

²¹ A. Krarup and W. Norwin (eds.), *Acta processus litium inter regem Danorum et archiepiscopum Lundensem* (København, 1932). On Jens Grand, see N. K. Andersen, *Ærkebiskop Jens Grand: En kirkeretshistorisk Undersøgelse*, 1–2 (*Teologiske Studier*, II. Afd., 4 and 6, 1943–44).

had not only assisted and protected the murderers of Erik Klipping but had even tried to kill the king and his brother Christopher.

Erik Menved's reign saw a return to more authoritarian royal government and was above all characterised by an ambitious foreign policy whose chief goals were territorial expansion in north Germany and Danish hegemony in the Baltic (see Chapter 12(e)). Erik came to dominate the east–west navigation to Estonia, with Rostock as a strongpoint and Lübeck a constant ally of Denmark.²² His warfare, however, demanded well-equipped horsemen and strong castles. In order to finance his expansionist policy he mortgaged large or smaller parts of his realm, a practice that was continued by his successor Christopher II (1320–2) and eventually led to the disintegration of the Danish kingdom.

In the latter part of Erik Menved's reign the Danish monarchy was exposed to mounting opposition both abroad and at home. In 1307 Duke Christopher revolted against his brother, siding with Count Jacob of Halland and King Håkon V of Norway, and established himself with his father-in-law, the duke of Pomerania. To the foreign triad of enemies which now threatened Erik – his brother, north German princes and Scandinavian princes – was added domestic resistance when the landowners of northern Jylland rebelled on account of a new tax.

Erik Menved died heirless in a confused Scandinavian political situation in 1319. The *Danehof* now came to the foreground again and demanded a *håndfæstning* in charter form as a condition for acknowledging Christopher II as his brother's successor. This was the first instance of a procedure which was to become normal in the fifteenth century: a new king had to issue a *håndfæstning* as a condition of his election. Christopher's *håndfæstning* carefully set out the king's obligations towards the four estates – the clergy, the secular nobility, the townsmen and the peasants – whereas the obligations of the estates towards the king are hardly mentioned. Christopher accepted these conditions, but afterwards disregarded them.

Status regni Daciae

In his litigation Archbishop Jens Grand maintained that Denmark could not be stable as long as the branch of Christopher I ruled.²³ After Erik Menved's

²² Hørby, *Velstands krise*, pp. 159–64.

²³ K. Hørby, *Status Regni Daciae: Studier i Christopherliniens ægteskaps- og alliancepolitik 1252–1319* (København, 1978), p. 184.

death these words may be said to have come true. On the other hand, it was customary to point to the good old days when Valdemar II ruled and not all results of his consolidation of the monarchy²⁴ were lost under his successors.

When Valdemar I had his seven-year-old son Knud anointed in 1170 he tried to establish a succession to the throne based on inheritance. Nevertheless, when Knud was enthroned in 1182 the traditional election in the four *landsthings* took place as before. The combination of right of inheritance and election was practised throughout the thirteenth century but did not prevent serious disturbances on the death of a king, as was for instance the case when Christopher I took over in 1252. Disappointed pretenders and heiresses caused difficulties not only for the royal house but also for the whole of society.

Queens, particularly queen dowagers, and their foreign relatives could strongly influence government. Thus Christopher I's Pomeranian widow, Queen Margrethe Sambiria, together with the duke of Braunschweig, headed the regency of her ten-year-old son King Erik Klipping. She was active in military as well as ordinary governmental affairs. When King Erik came of age she moved to the castle of Nykøbing from where she administered Estonia as well as her own estate. With Nykøbing as her permanent seat of administration, she was able to organise a more superior writing office than her largely itinerant son Erik Klipping.²⁵

In medieval Denmark kings had to be itinerant, not least in order to secure their revenues. According to *King Valdemar's Land Register* there were royal estates in every *herred*. In addition a king had income from the towns, from minting, from the *leding* system, and from his right to provisions when visiting local districts with his retinue. The nodal points of administration were the royal castles built from the Valdemarian Age onwards. The royal estates were administered from these and other strongholds, which meant that the king was dependant on trustworthy castellans and military officers who were bound to him by oaths of fealty, and in return enjoyed various privileges.

In spite of the weakening of royal power after the Valdemarian Age the rudiments of effective government established in that period were in some respects developed further, notably the beginning of national political institutions in the form of the *Danehof* and the council of the realm. There was also, in the

24 E. Ulsig, 'Valdemar Sejrs kongemagt', in Fenger and Jansen (eds.), *Jyske lov 750 år*, pp. 65–78.

25 N. Skyum-Nielsen, 'Kanslere og skrivere i Danmark 1250–1283', in T. E. Christiansen et al. (eds.), *Middelalderstudier: Tilægnede Aksel E. Christensen* (København, 1966), pp. 141–86.

latter half of the thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries, an expansion of royal justice. It should, however, be stressed that these national institutions functioned, to a large extent, as instruments of aristocratic opponents of the Crown who hampered the royal efforts to ban feuds and restrict legally the solidarity of kin.²⁶

26 On the solidarity of kin in Danish law, see Fenger, *Fejde og mandebød*.

12 (c) The Norwegian kingdom: succession disputes and consolidation

KNUT HELLE

The death of King Sigurd Crusader in 1130 marked the transition from a century of relatively peaceful internal conditions in Norway to a century of frequent struggles over the succession to the throne, the 'Civil Wars' as they have been termed by modern historians. In the course of these struggles, and partly also because of them, the development of a more centralised and better organised Norwegian kingdom gained momentum. It culminated in the period of internal consolidation between the last outbreak of hostilities in 1239–40 and the death of King Håkon V Magnusson in 1319. In that period a Norwegian dominion was also established over the Norse island communities to the west including Iceland.¹

The 'Civil Wars'

At his death in 1130 Sigurd Crusader left a son, Magnus, who had been designated as his sole successor. This meant that the claim of Harald Gille, accepted by Sigurd as his half-brother, was disregarded. Nevertheless, both Magnus and Harald were acclaimed kings in 1130 and entered a few years of uneasy

¹ For the general history of the Norwegian kingdom 1130–1319, see K. Helle, *Norge blir en stat 1130–1319* (K. Mykland et al. (eds), *Handbok i Norges historie*, 3, Bergen, 1974; reprinted 1991); K. Lunden, *Norge under Sverreætten 1177–1319* (Mykland (ed.), *Norges historie*, 3, Oslo, 1976); K. Helle, 'Down to 1536', in R. Danielsen et al., *Norway: A History from the Vikings to Our Own Time* (Oslo, 1995); K. Helle, *Under kongemakt og kirke 1130–1350* (K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norges historie*, 3, Oslo, 1995). For surveys of research on high medieval Norway, see K. Helle, 'Norway in the High Middle Ages: Recent views on the structure of society', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 6 (1981), pp. 161–89; K. Helle, 'Norway, 800–1200', in A. Faulkes and R. Perkins (eds.), *Viking Revaluations: Viking Society Centenary Symposium 14–15 May 1992* (London, 1993), pp. 1–14. See also S. Bagge, 'The formation of state and concepts of society in 13th century Norway', in E. Vestergaard (ed.), *Continuity and Change: A Symposium* (Odense, 1986), pp. 43–58; S. Bagge, 'State building in medieval Norway', *Forum for utvikiningsstudier* (1989), pp. 129–47.

co-rulership.² In this they followed a tradition initiated when Magnus Olafsson and Harald Sigurdsson agreed to share the Norwegian royal power in 1046. On some occasions after that two or three kings jointly ruled a kingdom that from the eleventh century comprised the territory from the 'River' (Göta älv) in the south to a fluid northern boundary in Troms–Finnmark (see Chapter 8(c)).

The practice of joint rulership was rooted in a custom of royal succession which gave any son of an earlier national king, legitimate or illegitimate, hereditary right to claim royal power. Such a claim had to be based on provable descent, tested if necessary by ordeal of fire, but this did not alone give accession to the throne. A legitimate ruler also had to be ceremoniously 'taken' or adjudged to be king in one or more of the *althings* (assemblies of all freemen) that met all over the kingdom, in which the claimant was given 'king's name' and pledges were exchanged between him and his subjects. *Things* of acclamation which met in towns were apparently preferred and one of them, *Eyrathing* in Trondheim, the town of St Olaf, had by the start of the Civil Wars acquired particular prestige. But other local *things* were also summoned to approve a new king and thus take care of the element of election in the customary system of succession.

If a claimant to the throne had sufficient military support it was not possible to refuse him acclamation, as was the case when the Danish king Valdemar I arrived in Viken with a large fleet in 1165 and was 'taken' king at *Borgarthing* in the town of Borg (now Sarpsborg). Such approval was, on the other hand, considered necessary to secure obedience and public dues for the king, and was hardly a matter of pure form. It normally depended on a modicum of public support for the claimant, at least locally, and was regularly sought by all pretenders.

It was still not possible for one ruler to make his power felt over most of the kingdom at one and the same time. A king could only have direct control over the part of the country where he was present with his *hirð* or retinue; elsewhere he had to govern through local representatives who were tied to him by bonds of fealty. Most prominent among them were the *lendir menn* ('landed men') who constituted the top stratum of the royal *hirð* aristocracy

2 For the history of the following Civil Wars, see besides the surveys mentioned in n. 1: N. Bjørgo, 'Samkongedømme kontra enekongedømme', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 49 (Oslo, 1970), pp. 1–33; S. Bagge, 'Samkongedømme og enekongedømme', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 54 (Oslo, 1975), pp. 239–74; N. Bjørgo, 'Samkongedømme og enekongedømme', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 55 (Oslo, 1976), pp. 204–21; S. Bagge, 'Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 65 (Oslo, 1986), pp. 145–97; S. Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996); B. Opheim, 'Med stonad frå frender og vener: Slektskap og venskap som partidannende faktorar i den norske innbyrdesstriden 1130–1280' (unpublished graduate thesis, University of Bergen, 1996).

(Chapter 8(c)). Under such circumstances joint rulership could serve as a peaceful solution to the problem of competing candidates, as it did until the death of Sigurd Crusader. By dividing direct rule and its fruits between them, co-rulers could also exercise kingship quite effectively. They would often have their main support in different regions of the extensive and topographically divided kingdom.

However, peaceful co-rule proved impossible for Magnus Sigurdsson and Harald Gille. Magnus' ambition to be sole ruler led him to break the peace and drive Harald away in 1134. However, Harald returned with Danish support and attacked Magnus in Bergen at the beginning of 1135. Magnus was captured and mutilated, and was thereafter known as Magnus 'the Blind'. Thus started the succession struggles that were to put their imprint on the following hundred years.

In the kings' sagas³ the Civil Wars appear as personal conflicts between rival pretenders and their supporters. In the early phase the fighting factions consisted of rather loose groupings of *lendir menn* and other leading men with their retainers, held together by common interests and personal bonds of loyalty. Such bonds were determined by kinship and marital relations and not least by mutually binding 'friendship'. Friendship in a more technical sense was established by exchange of gifts and favours between equals or by the generosity and protection which highly placed persons could offer people of lower standing in return for support and service. Characteristically, the kings' sagas in the first phase of the Civil Wars distinguish between generous, sociable, successful kings who listened to and were supported by their 'friends', and their avaricious, haughty, unsuccessful counterparts. Harald Gille belonged to the former type, Magnus Sigurdsson to the latter.

3 Kings' sagas dealing with the Civil Wars are: *Ágrip* and *Fagrskinna* (B. Einarsson (ed.), *Ágrip af Noregskonunga sögum, Fagrskinna – Noregs konungatal* (Íslenzk fornrit, 29, Reykjavík, 1984)); *Morkinskinna* (F. Jónsson (ed.), *Morkinskinna (Samfund til utgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 53, København, 1932)*); *Heimskringla* (B. Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Heimskringla, 1–3* (Íslenzk fornrit, 26–8, Reykjavík, 1941–51); English translation by L. M. Hollander, *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway by Snorri Sturluson* (Austin, 1964)); *Orkneyinga saga* (S. Nordal (ed.), *Orkneyinga saga (Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 40, København, 1913–16)*; English translation by H. Pálsson and P. Edwards, *Orkneyinga saga: the History of the Earls of Orkney* (London, 1981)); *Sverris saga* (G. Indrebø (ed.), *Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 4°* (Kristiania, 1920); English translation by J. Sephton, *Sverrisaga: the Saga of King Sverri of Norway* (London, 1899; reprinted Felinfach, 1994)); *Boglunga sögur* (H. Magerøy (ed.), *Soga om birkebeinar og baglar: Boglunga sögur, 2* (Norrøne tekster, 5, Oslo, 1988)); *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (A. Kjær and L. Holm-Olsen (eds.), *Det Arnamagæanske Haandskrift 81a Fol. (Skálholtsbók yngsta)* (Kristiania, 1910–Oslo, 1986); M. Mundt (ed.), *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar etter Sth. 8 fol., AM 325 VIII, 4° og AM 304, 4°* (Norrøne tekster, 2, Oslo, 1977); English translation by G. W. Dasent, *The Saga of Hakon and a Fragment of the Saga of Magnus (Rerum Britannicarum medii ævi Scriptores: Icelandic Sagas, 4, London 1894)*).

Inter-Nordic alliances, such as the one that brought Harald Danish support against Magnus, were important for the success of pretenders. Since succession struggles also occurred frequently in contemporary Sweden (Chapter 8(e)) and from the 1130s to the 1150s in Denmark as well (Chapter 12(b)), such proximity meant that factions could seek support in other kingdoms. For Danish kings, who maintained their traditional claim to overlordship over Norwegian Viken, it was natural to support Norwegian factions that might help them to make good that claim. Local rulers in west Swedish provinces also often intervened in Norwegian affairs. Marital relations served to cement Nordic alliances; many women of royal families were given (or taken) in marriage outside their own kingdoms, and some of them played important political roles by virtue of their position as royal wives, widows and mothers.

There is little reason to doubt the saga picture that personal ambitions and personal relations were determining factors behind the Civil Wars, but the reason for the outbreak of hostilities in the 1130s should probably also be sought in the position of the secular aristocracy which split into factions that supported different pretenders. In the preceding period of internal peace kings such as Magnus Olafsson, Harald Sigurdsson, and Magnus Olafsson Bare-leg had conducted an expansionist policy which gave vent to the warlike inclinations of the aristocracy and brought it honour and wealth in the form of booty and tribute – in the Viking tradition. Such external activities, of which King Sigurd's crusade in 1108–11 was a late example, must have strengthened the *lendir menn's* self-esteem, military ability and appetite for power. But when the Civil Wars started they had for some time been reduced to living largely off the country's own resources, notably income from land and other contributions from the farming population. They could best supplement their private economy and local power basis by sharing the king's power and income, and would consequently support and if necessary fight for their own candidates. It has also been suggested that the aristocratic competition for control of the royal power was sharpened by the fact that ecclesiastical institutions in the twelfth century acquired an increasing part of the country's landed property.

Aristocratic interests may thus have been instrumental in provoking the succession struggles from the 1130s, reinforcing the personal ambitions of pretenders and the tensions inherent in the customary system of succession. Political antagonism may have been deepened by the ongoing growth of population which led to unfavourable living conditions among the lower strata of society and bred discontent, making it easier to recruit people to the fighting factions, lured by the spoils of war and the possibility of social advancement. Social unrest among the broader population may thus have widened the span

of conflicts as well as being an effect of them. The warring factions increasingly lived off the land, and people in districts which suffered forced contributions and plunder must often have wanted to get back at their tormentors by joining the other side. No wonder, then, that an increasing number of socially rootless people appear to have joined the warring factions.

Regional interests and antagonisms obviously conditioned the Civil Wars from the start. Magnus Sigurdsson had his strongest position in Trøndelag, while Harald Gille appears to have had most support from Viken. When Harald was killed in 1136 he left two young sons: the legitimate Inge, fostered in Viken, and the illegitimate Sigurd, fostered in Trøndelag. Harald's circle of *lendir menn* preferred Inge as his successor but nevertheless found it necessary to have Sigurd acclaimed co-ruler; they did not expect the people of Trøndelag to accept a sole king from Viken. Thus a new joint rulership, dominated by the magnates around the two infant kings, was established. A third co-ruler was added when an elder illegitimate son of Harald, Eystein, was fetched from Scotland in 1142 and taken king at *Eyrathing*. This does not mean that there were clear-cut regional divisions between the factions in the Civil Wars, but there is little doubt that the struggles were fuelled by regional particularism. There was, especially in Trøndelag but also in other regions, a general tendency to oppose a royal power that expanded from other parts of the country with new burdens on the local population.

Regional particularism was one of the factors that determined the transition from relatively loose factions in the early phase of the struggles into more permanent 'flocks' (ON *flokkar*), military factions or parties with their own names, who took their own kings when the former ones had died. When open fighting broke out between the sons of Harald Gille in the mid-1150s King Inge was supported by a strong group of *lendir menn* who commanded wide support in Vestlandet and Viken; this developed into one of the two main parties dominating the following conflicts. It gained strength by eliminating Inge's two royal brothers, and when Inge was himself killed in battle in 1161 it supported the infant Magnus Erlingsson as his successor (1161–84). Magnus descended from the royal house through his mother Kristin, Sigurd Crusader's daughter, and thus lacked the normal requirement of being a king's son. Nevertheless, his father, the west Norwegian *lendr maðr* Erling Skakke ('wryneck'), succeeded in making him the rallying point for the strongest faction in the Civil Wars hitherto. This was partly due to the support of the Danish king Valdemar I, Kristin's cousin, who appears to have been promised a revival of Danish overlordship over Viken, but above all to Erling and Magnus' alliance with the Norwegian church under its leader, Archbishop Eystein Erlendsson (1161–88).

The kingship of Magnus Erlingsson, representing aristocratic interests in Vestlandet and Viken, met with opposition in areas where the brothers of King Inge had earlier found support: in Trøndelag, Opplandene (the interior of Østlandet), and the south-eastern part of Viken (present Bohuslän). In peripheral and independent parts of Østlandet, such as Telemark and the wooded areas bordering Swedish Värmland, it appears to have been particularly easy to find support for risings against rulers over the central areas of Viken. In the 1160s and 1170s Erling Skakke had to defend his son's kingship against several 'flocks' with footholds in these districts and descendants of King Inge's brothers as their pretenders. They had little luck until the remains of the so-called *Birkibeinar* ('birchlegs'), heavily defeated by King Magnus in 1177, took as their new king Sverre, who had been brought up in Føroyar and claimed to be son of King Sigurd Haraldsson. Under his extraordinary leadership the *Birkibeinar*, originally a rather proletarian 'flock' recruited mostly from the peripheral areas of Østlandet and supported from Sweden, developed into the party that was in the end the strongest faction in the Civil Wars.

Until Sverre's time (1177–1202) fighting had alternated with shorter or longer periods of peace and had normally involved modest forces: mainly the *hirð* retinues of kings and pretenders and the personal retainers of *lendir menn* and other leading men, joined by local people who could be persuaded to take part in the fighting. But as Sverre and the Birchlegs increased their fighting power by skillful guerilla warfare towards the end of the 1170s, the struggle assumed more of a real civil-war character, affecting the whole community.

The fight between Magnus and Sverre is described in great detail in *Sverris saga*, the first part of which was commissioned by Sverre himself (cf. Chapter 15). People in the regions controlled by the two parties were now mobilised for annual *leidang* expeditions and thousands took part in the largest battles on land or at sea. Magnus' fall in 1184 did not prevent his adherents from raising new flocks under new pretenders in the years to come. Most dangerous were the *Baglar* ('croziers') who rose against Sverre in 1196 under the leadership of Bishop Nikolas Arnesson of Oslo. They had the full support of Archbishop Eirik Ivarsson (1189–1205) who had reacted strongly against Sverre's policy of limiting the freedom of the Church and gone into exile, where he was eventually joined by all the Norwegian bishops. Sverre was excommunicated and in 1198 Pope Innocent III threatened the parts of Norway that continued to support him with interdict. Nevertheless, he went on fighting the *Baglar* until his death in 1202, slowly gaining the upper hand in the most extensive warfare of the Civil War period.

Sverre's conflict with the *Baglar* clearly illustrates how warfare in itself contributed to the general strengthening of royal power that took place in the latter phase of the Civil Wars. Sverre had now at his disposal a professional military force hardened through two decades of fighting; it consisted of his *hirð* and bands (ON *sveitar*) under commanders who were his liegemen and could represent him in regions where he was not himself present. From Trøndelag and Vestlandet he was able to organise large-scale *leidang* expeditions against Østlandet, where the *Baglar* found most of their support; the population there was punished with increased *leidang* taxation and extra contributions. By military force it was thus possible to force greater burdens on peasant society and strengthen the economic basis for a royal governing apparatus.

We have seen, however, that the use of more professional military personnel did not replace the traditional mustering of the general population in Norway; the obligation to serve in the naval levy was maintained throughout the high Middle Ages. The Norwegian peasants thus remained a military factor, and one might add, a factor of some political importance too. The latter is revealed by developments after Sverre's death. It now became clear that the toll taken of peasant society by the heavy warfare had bred a desire for peace that could not in the long run be ignored by the warring aristocracy, the more so as it was voiced by the Church whose leaders now increasingly came to play the role of mediator between *Birkibeinar* and *Baglar*.

Sverre was succeeded by his son Håkon (1202–4), who called the exiled bishops back and made peace with them. His early death temporarily destroyed the prospects of peace and the fighting between *Baglar* and *Birkibeinar* was resumed for another four years, but greatly reduced in scale and rarely involving more than the professional warriors on both sides. When new kings had to be taken by the *Birkibeinar* in 1204 and the *Baglar* in 1207, the peasants of the acclamation *things* with bishops as their spokesmen went against the soldiers' wishes for war-leaders and decided on more peaceful candidates. The soldiers had to give in because it would be impossible to go on fighting without the economic contributions from the peasants. In 1208 a more lasting peace was effected by ecclesiastical mediation, resulting in the division of the kingdom. The *Birkibein* king Inge Bårdsson (1204–17) was to rule western and northern Norway together with his earl and war-leader, while the king of the *Baglar*, Filippus Simonsson (1207–17), was to rule most of Østlandet.

The death of the two kings in 1217 brought about the final reconciliation between *Birkibeinar* and *Baglar* under the kingship of Håkon Sverresson's illegitimate son, Håkon. United in one royal *hirð* the leading magnates on both

sides were in the following decade able to suppress the last east Norwegian risings. This was first done under the leadership of the regent and earl Skule Bårdsson, King Inge's half-brother, and finally under the command of King Håkon himself. Skule's own royal ambitions had not met with success in 1217, and he was not in the long run content with the earlship over one-third of the kingdom. Long-held tensions between him and the king finally resulted in open revolt: Skule had himself acclaimed king at *Eyrathing* in 1239 but was defeated and killed the following year. Hence the sole rule of kings of the Sverre family was secured for the rest of the high Middle Ages.

The Civil Wars can be regarded as the second and last phase of the conflicts that led to Norwegian political unification. The first phase ended with the fall of St Olaf in 1030, followed by a century of internal peace during which the periods of joint rulership bear witness to the fact that political unity was far from realised. The second phase ended in victory and undivided rule for the kings of the Sverre dynasty. Under Sverre's leadership the *Birkibeinar* won their first firm foothold in Trøndelag, exploiting the opposition there against the ruling circles in Vestlandet and Viken. Sverre's victory over Magnus Erlingsson brought him control over Vestlandet in the 1180s. His fight with the *Baglar* towards the end of his reign was primarily for control over Østlandet, which was finally obtained by his grandson Håkon Håkonsson in the 1220s. The *Birkibein* monarchy was now strong enough to quell the traditional insurrectionary tendencies in the peripheral districts of Østlandet from which Sverre had drawn his original support. This was in large measure made possible by a number of organisational and ideological developments that had occurred in parallel with the previous succession disputes and interacted with them.

Centralising tendencies in the latter part of the twelfth century

In 1152 or 1153 Cardinal Nicolaus Brekespear, later Pope Hadrian IV, came to Scandinavia as papal legate to establish separate Norwegian and Swedish church provinces. His mission accorded with the general Gregorian policy of bringing the ecclesiastical periphery of Europe more directly under papal control, but it was probably also motivated by the wish to keep Norway and Sweden outside the reach of a possible alliance between the new German king, Frederic Barbarossa, and the archbishop of Bremen who wanted to bring the Nordic archbishopric of Lund back under his authority.⁴

4 A. O. Johnsen, *Studier vedrørende kardinal Nicolaus Brekespears legasjon til Norden* (Oslo, 1946); Johnsen, *Når ble erkebiskopstolen i Norge opprettet?* (*Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers*

In Sweden Cardinal Nicolaus was not able to create an archiepiscopal see but in Norway his legation brought about the planned result: Nidaros (Trondheim) became the metropolitan see of a church province comprising eleven bishoprics, five in Norway and six in the Norse island communities of the Western Ocean (Greenland, Skálholt and Hólar in Iceland, Føroyar, Orkney-Shetland, and the Isle of Man with the Hebrides). The new arrangement had obviously been prepared from the Norwegian side; it was in the interest of the royal power, still peacefully shared by the three sons of King Harald Gille, to tie the islands of the Western Ocean closer to Norway. A separate Norwegian church province might also reduce Danish influence in Viken through the metropolitan see of Lund.

Some ten years later, in 1163 or (less probably) 1164, the first Scandinavian coronation took place in Bergen, giving divine sanction to the royal status of Magnus Erlingsson. This was an outcome of the above-mentioned alliance between Archbishop Eystein and Erling Skakke, and compensated for Magnus' weak hereditary right.

To provide a suitable setting for the great events of 1152–3 and 1163–4 large political meetings were convened, made up of bishops and other clerics, leading magnates and other members of the royal *hirð*, and peasants appointed from the various bishoprics or law provinces. These are the first known Norwegian assemblies that drew participants from all over the country, and the presence of peasant representatives seems to reflect the intention to create a national *thing* to deal with important ecclesiastical and state business. Both assemblies approved ecclesiastical reforms and legal provisions covering the whole realm; the laws were then sent to the regional *lawthings* which were advised to attend to their final enactment. A law determining the succession to the throne was probably the outcome of the coronation meeting in 1163 or 1164;⁵ it alluded to Magnus as a crowned king and prescribed that a new king should be taken by a national assembly of the type described above. Peasant representatives should make the formal decision with the bishops as influential advisers.

The law of succession sought to remove the legal foundation for joint rulership and rival claims to the throne by laying down the principle of one king for the whole of Norway. The eldest legitimate son of the deceased king should have the first right to succeed him and after him other legitimate sons,

Selskabs Skrifter, 1949, 1, Trondheim, 1950); *On the Background for the Establishment of the Norwegian Church Province* (Avhandlingar utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, II. Hist.Filos. Klasse, Ny Serie, 11, 1967).

5 R. Keyser and P. A. Munch (eds.), *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387*, 1 (Christiania, 1846), pp. 3–4.

subject to their being qualified to rule justly and peacefully in accordance with the ecclesiastical *rex iustus* ideal.⁶

The royal–ecclesiastical cooperation in the 1150s and 1160s meant that important initiatives were taken to organise society nationally. The Church started out with a national hierarchical organisation and the monarchy followed under the organisational and ideological influence of the Church. At the same time the Norwegian church took the first decisive steps away from its heavy dependence on the monarchy and the peasantry towards the Gregorian ideal of freedom from secular influence under papal authority. In 1152–3 and under Magnus Erlingsson the monarchy made concessions to ecclesiastical liberty in three particularly important areas: the election of bishops and appointment of priests, financial control of churches and their property, and jurisdiction over the clergy and in matters of particular concern to the Church. It was, however, to take time and involve conflicts before the Church gained ground more permanently in these matters.

Sverre Sigurdsson had to win his kingdom by fighting the strong alliance between Magnus Erlingsson and the Church, which explains the extended and bitter warfare that followed his acclamation as king of the *Birkibeinar*. He refused to accept the significant benefits which the Church had secured from the monarchy in previous decades, and tried to return to the old situation with the king as the head of a national church. This position was set out in the vernacular *Oration against the Bishops*, a pamphlet written by a clerical adherent of Sverre in the last years of his reign, defending royal authority over the Church with carefully arranged quotations from Gratian's *Decretum*.⁷ Earlier the uncompromising attitudes of Sverre and Archbishop Eirik had in practice destroyed what hopes there were of a reconciliation between Sverre and the Church after Magnus Erlingsson's fall, leading the Church to give its support to his opponents in the 1190s.

However, Sverre also took over and exploited for his own ends much of the political ideology that had been formulated to support the kingship of Magnus Erlingsson, not least the idea that the king held a divine office. He even managed to force through his own coronation in 1194. But Sverre and his successors tied the monarchy directly to the grace of God, without allowing the Church a decisive role as mediator. In his propaganda he also exploited the popular standing of St Olaf, who had, not least through the efforts of

6 T. Tobiassen, 'Tronfølge og privilegiebrev', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 43 (1964), pp. 181–273.

7 A. Holtsmark, *En tale mot biskopene: En sproglig-historisk undersøkelse* (Skrifter Utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, II. Hist.-Filos. Klasse, 1930, 9, 1931); E. Gunnes, *Kongens ære: Kongemakt og kirke i 'En tale mot biskopene'* (Oslo, 1971).

Archbishop Eystein,⁸ come to figure as the eternal king of Norway – *perpetuus rex Norvegiæ*, as he is called in the contemporary *Historia Norvegiæ*. Eystein had persuaded Magnus Erlingsson to declare himself St Olaf's vassal in an extensive charter of privileges to the Church; Sverre on his part presented himself as St Olaf's champion and true successor, identifying 'St Olaf's Law' with the legal situation before the monarchy had started giving concessions to the Church in 1152–3.

In his governmental practice Sverre followed in the footsteps of Magnus Erlingsson. He convened larger political meetings (as far as that was possible in a divided kingdom), and in 1189–90, before his break with Archbishop Eirik, continued the royal–ecclesiastical cooperation over peace legislation that had been characteristic of Magnus' and Archbishop Eystein's days. A new system of local administration built on royal officials called *sýslumenn* may have originated before Sverre but he extended it, and he made an apparently original contribution by appointing royal 'lawmen' (ON *løgmen*) who were to instruct the *thing* courts in matters of law. He was also ahead of his time in military matters, both strategically and technologically, building larger warships and erecting the first stone-built Norwegian strongholds in Trondheim and Bergen. Sverre's long-drawn-out fight with factions that comprised most of the country's *lendir menn* led to heavy bloodshed among the leading families of the land; consequently, the men who replaced the former magnates in the *hirð* of the victorious *Birkibein* monarchy constituted a more clearly service aristocracy than the earlier secular aristocracy. This proved to be of great importance for the further development of political organisation.

Consolidation of the monarchy

Old members of the *Birkibein hirð* took the initiative to have the thirteen-year-old Håkon Håkonsson acclaimed king in *Eyrathing* and other *things* around the country in 1217; they outmanoeuvred Earl Skule Bårdsson and his followers who had ecclesiastical support. But the church leaders were realistic enough to support Håkon when, after a time, it became clear that peace and a united kingdom were most likely to be realised through him. They had, however, to accept that there was no room for such a politically independent and influential Church as had existed in the days of Magnus Erlingsson. This became clear during the negotiations in connection with the coronation that Håkon finally

8 On Archbishop Eystein, see E. Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein: Statsmann og kirkebygger* (Oslo, 1996).

obtained in 1247 by papal dispensation for his illegitimate birth; the concessions given the Church on that occasion were limited.

Nevertheless, the monarchy of the Sverre family gradually acknowledged a considerable degree of internal ecclesiastical autonomy. In the Tønsberg Concordat of 1277 Håkon's son and successor Magnus (1263–80) made greater legal and economic concessions to the Church than it had ever received previously; particularly important was the judicial authority now recognised for ecclesiastical courts.⁹ After Magnus' death the baronial council which ruled on behalf of the young Eirik Magnusson (1280–99) refused to respect completely all the rights obtained by the Church. This led to a bitter but passing conflict in the early 1280s, but henceforth the relations between Crown and Church gradually returned to normal. The Church was able to enjoy a comparatively high degree of internal autonomy, even if there was continued disagreement over the legal limits of this autonomy throughout the rest of the high Middle Ages.

For the consolidated monarchy the right of inheritance played a central role. The law of succession from 1163–4 had never been carried into effect, although it seems to have influenced some of the *thing* acclamations of kings in the following decades. Håkon Håkonsson's new law of succession in 1260 prescribed a virtually automatic right of inheritance for royal descendants, starting with the eldest legitimate son of the deceased king. This principle was upheld in later laws of succession in 1273 and 1302 which elaborated and partly modified the order of succession.¹⁰ Since these laws of succession, which were a particularly Norwegian phenomenon, were also followed in practice, the consolidated high medieval kingdom of Norway must be regarded as truly hereditary, a tradition which was eventually extinguished in the late Middle Ages (cf. Chapters 23 and 24).

The clearest reflection of the internal strength of the consolidated monarchy after the Civil Wars is its legislation. An extensive revision of the earlier provincial laws began towards the end of Håkon Håkonsson's long reign and earned his son and successor Magnus his nickname 'Law-mender'. In 1260 King Håkon issued not only the above-mentioned law of succession but also a 'new law' with provisions concerning various matters, above all the peace of the land. In the days of King Magnus Erlingsson the legal initiatives of Crown and Church had been presented as advisory in relation to the law-enacting *lawthings*, but in 1260 the king appeared as the virtual legislator; in his own

⁹ R. Keyser and P. A. Munch (eds.), *Norges gamle Love*, 2 (Christiania, 1848), pp. 462–77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 308–10, 24–32; R. Keyser and P. A. Munch (eds.), *Norges gamle Love*, 3 (Christiania, 1849), pp. 44–9.

name he issued laws that reduced the *lawthings* to ratifying bodies. This was a practice continued by Magnus Law-mender when he started the more systematic revision of the provincial law-codes which finally resulted in the general rural *Landlaw* of 1274, giving the kingdom a common law-code earlier than most other European countries. In 1276 an urban code, the *Townlaw*, followed which was aimed at regulating conditions in Bergen but was soon adopted in other Norwegian towns as well. In parallel with the work on these national codes, the rights and duties of the royal *hirð* were regulated in the *Hirðskrá* ('the book of the *hirð*').¹¹ Under the sons of Magnus there followed a series of royal ordinances (ON *skipanar*), partly amendments to the great law-codes (*rettarbætr*), partly provisions concerning other legal fields.¹²

The law-codes of Magnus Law-mender not only present the king as legislator, but also as the highest judge in the land, in accordance with the ideology set out in the *King's Mirror* in the 1250s. In this capacity he presides over a system of public justice which is a source of income and power and gives him a high standing in the eyes of his subjects.

In the period of internal consolidation between 1240 and 1319 a royal governmental apparatus was organised which made the kingdom into a state-like entity, 'the Norwegian King's Realm' (*Nóregs konungs ríki*) as it was called in the *Landlaw* and subsequent legislation. By the early fourteenth century this apparatus consisted of a local and regional administration which covered the entire continental kingdom. Some fifty *sýslumenn* (comparable to the English sheriffs) represented the king locally in fiscal, judicial and military matters within fixed administrative districts (*sýslur* or *lén*). The country was divided into ten judicial districts, each with its royal lawman who represented the king as a judge; in addition, the towns of Bergen and Trondheim had their own lawmen. The lawman administered the law courts of his district, which in most cases would have an annual *lawthing* as its highest court of justice. A regional treasurer (*fēhirðir*) resided in each of the fortified royal estates of the four main towns of Bergen, Trondheim, Oslo and Tønsberg. He received the king's revenue from his region and made payments on the king's behalf. The king also had his own urban administrator (*gjaldkeri*) in these four towns.

The central government was in the hands of the king and his inner circle. The attendant part of the *hirð* contained in embryo the first central administration of the kingdom; here the leading officers (the marshal or *stallari*, the standard-bearer or *merkismaðr*, the treasurer or *fēhirðir*, the seneschal or

¹¹ The law-codes mentioned have been printed in *Norges gamle Love*, 2.

¹² See *Norges gamle Love*, 3.

dróttseti) were also entrusted with functions of state. From the mid-thirteenth century the chancellor emerged as the most important central administrator; as the leader of a small staff of clerks he was responsible for issuing royal letters and documents and keeping accounts and records. The official use of writing, which had developed gradually from the mid-twelfth century, facilitated regular contact between central and local administration and gave the former a means of controlling distant areas. The organisation of the *hirð*, too, helped to bind together centre and periphery. The royal local officials were the king's liegemen and all other members of the *hirð*, wherever they happened to be, were obliged to support the officials in carrying out royal business.

The liegemen of the *hirð* enjoyed the king's special protection and were paid wages for the special fealty and service they accorded him. The leading men among them were rewarded with royal land and/or administrative posts which gave them a larger share of the royal revenue than *hirð* members of lower rank. In 1277, or shortly before, the liegemen were personally exempted from the *leidang* tax together with two (for lower ranks, one) of their retainers. Since the Landlaw of 1274 fixed this tax according to the value of land owned or leased, a practice developed whereby the land of the liegemen's residential farms was exempted. As a result of the tax exemption the liegemen stood out as a privileged class, though the distinction between them and the rest of society was not a sharp one; the *hirð* was continually being recruited from both peasant and urban society, and efficient and reliable men could work their way to the most important posts in royal service.

In 1277 King Magnus decided that the *lendir menn* of the *hirð* should henceforth be called barons and that the next-in-rank *skutilsveinar* (Chapter 5) should be called knights; both ranks were granted the right to use the title *herra* (Lord, Sir). From the time of Håkon V (1299–1319) the Latin denomination of *armiger* (man-at-arms) and its vernacular equivalent were used for the ordinary *hirð*-man. The titles of *lendir maðr* and baron went out of use after 1308 when the king officially refrained from appointing new ones. The result was that the Norwegian nobility came to consist of knights and men-at-arms, as in Europe generally.

The clergy had been personally freed from military and economic *leidang* obligations since the middle of the twelfth century, with each person benefiting together with two of his household. Later, tax exemption was extended to non-clerical retainers of the archbishop and in 1277 this was decreed for a hundred of them together with forty retainers of each bishop.

Royal liegemen and prelates always participated in the national assemblies (Norw. *riksmøter*) which were convened from 1152–3 and were most frequent

during the reigns of Håkon Håkonsson and Magnus Law-mender. The assemblies were clearly meant to take over the role of local and regional *things* as far as possible in approving laws and providing a suitable setting for acts and decisions concerning the succession to the throne and for other important national political business; this was particularly clear when representatives of the peasantry were occasionally summoned to take part. From the start such mixed clerical and lay assemblies were also used by the Church as national synods. However, they never became completely institutionalised and did not replace the *lawthings* as law-approving bodies. In the reigns of Eirik Magnusson and his brother Håkon V it appears that both Crown and Church could, for the most part, manage without larger national assemblies. The Church replaced them with provincial councils of bishops and the Crown used the more restricted royal council, from 1319 'the council of the realm' (Norw. *riksråd*), as an advisory and consenting body at the national level.¹³

With an administrative apparatus spread over the whole mainland kingdom, bound together within the framework of the *hirð* and by written communications, it became possible to rule the country from a small number of urban centres. In the thirteenth century Bergen came close to being the normal royal residence; most of the national assemblies met there, and the beginnings of a sedentary central administration was attached to the monumental and fortified royal palace that was built there by Håkon Håkonsson and his successors. Consequently, Bergen deserves to be called the first Norwegian capital. From the reign of Håkon V Oslo became a politico-administrative centre of equal status with Bergen for the whole region south of Trøndelag and east of Vestlandet, while Bergen retained its position for the rest of mainland Norway together with the tributary lands to the west. The other Norwegian towns became seats of local and regional administration and thus gained far greater importance than their modest number and populations would in themselves indicate. The central-place function of the towns was strengthened by the fact that they served a similar administrative function for the Church.

A necessary condition for the organisational development of both monarchy and Church was an economic structure stable enough to provide regular contributions from the agricultural population. Through the system of tenant farming (Chapter 10) both Crown and Church had a regular income from their landed estates, though modest in the case of the former. Fines and confiscations were probably the king's chief source of income, part of which went directly

¹³ The royal assemblies and the development from royal council to council of the realm are treated on a comparative Nordic and European basis by K. Helle, *Konge og gode menn i norsk riksstyring ca. 1150–1319* (Bergen, 1972).

to remunerate the *sýslumenn*. Taxation, too, appears to have amounted to more than the royal income from landed property towards the end of the high Middle Ages. The all-important royal tax was the *leidang* which had come into existence in the latter phase of the Civil Wars through the conversion into more regular taxation of the economic contributions to the naval levy. The Landlaw of 1274 prescribed the payment of annual *leidang* during peace time, fixed at half the amount of the provisions due in an actual mobilisation and assessed according to the value of land owned or leased. The Crown also enjoyed a modest income from the 'tributary lands' of the western ocean, and there were in addition customs duties and other dues from trade and fishing, and the fruits of various regal rights such as minting, trading with the Sami, and the general right to property that was not legally possessed by anyone else.¹⁴

It seems clear that the total revenue of the Norwegian monarchy was small in comparison with that enjoyed by rulers of the neighbouring kingdoms and elsewhere in Europe, and most of it must have gone into upholding the administrative and military apparatus described above. How, then, was it possible for the Norwegian monarchy to administer the kingdom to the considerable degree that it apparently did towards the end of the high Middle Ages?

A decisive factor was that the population not only provided the king and his helpers with goods and money; it also made a significant contribution in the form of unpaid services. Besides maintaining the general obligation to serve in the naval levy, the monarchy entrusted a great deal to local self-management in both town and country. A local élite of 'good' or 'judicious' men were systematically drawn into judicial and administrative functions under the control of royal officials. In addition the rural population was obliged to provide transport for public officials, maintain the roads, and carry official messages. People in both town and country were to support the poor, and in the towns the fire service and beaching of ships were notable collective responsibilities.

The system of self-management also shows that the authority of the high medieval monarchy was based on more than the interests of the *hirð* aristocracy and the cooperation of the Church that was normal in political and administrative affairs. The monarchy could also rely, to a significant degree, on having the support of local public opinion. There were, of course, tensions

¹⁴ The most up-to-date survey of the royal revenue at the end of the high Middle Ages has been given by H. Björkvik, *Folketap og sammenbrudd 1350–1520*, in K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norgeshistorie*, 4 (Oslo, 1996), pp. 50–4.

caused by the Crown's demands for financial and military assistance and abuses by its local representatives. Nevertheless, royal legislation from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries shows that the central government was concerned to prevent the exploitation of the king's subjects by royal officials and private landowners, and that it attached importance to maintaining the legal basis and the support the monarchy had in peasant society. The Norwegian peasantry had kept more political influence than its counterparts in most other contemporary European countries. On the other hand, the legislation to protect the king's ordinary subjects reflects the reality that they were, to some extent, exploited by local magnates in the royal service and that central control of distant districts was limited.

The 'Norwegian dominion'

In the latter phase of the Civil Wars the territorial influence of the Norwegian king was extended. From King Sverre's days the province of Jämtland (in present-day Sweden) lay under the Norwegian crown and it appears that a royal *sýslumaðr* was in charge of the tributary Føroyar. At the same time, Orkney and Shetland became more than nominal parts of the kingdom. The Orkney earl Harald Maddadson made the mistake of supporting a rising against Sverre in 1193–4 and was forced to submit to him in 1195; Shetland was put directly under the Crown and Harald had to give up half the legal fines from Orkney in order to be reinstated as the king's earl. After Sverre's death Harald severed the ties with Norway, but when peace had been made between *Birkibeinar* and *Baglar* in Norway in 1208, the two co-ruling sons of Harald had to pay damages and accept the conditions from Sverre's days. The peace of 1208 led to a plundering expedition of former Norwegian war-leaders in the Hebrides, with the result that the petty kings of the Hebrides and the Isle of Man went to Norway in 1210, renewed their oath of fealty to the *Birkibein* king, and paid the tribute they owed.

As the Civil Wars ebbed out in Norway during the first part of Håkon Håkonsson's reign the new-found internal strength of the monarchy was directed to foreign relations. Continuing the tradition from the Viking Age the active foreign policy had a marked westward orientation. Its basis had been strengthened by the establishment of the separate Norwegian church province in 1152–3 and it was stimulated by the particularly important trading links with the British Isles. Here, the king had traditional claims to the isles north and west of Scotland, strengthened by Magnus Bare-leg's expeditions around 1100.

Control over Iceland loomed large in King Håkon's plans.¹⁵ By 1220, when Snorri Sturluson became the *lendr maðr* of King Håkon and Earl Skule, all the *goðorð* (chieftains' offices) of Iceland were controlled by five leading families; they had come a long way towards establishing their rule over large territorial units (*ríki*) (see Chapter 8(d)) and continued to fight hard for supremacy. In this situation the Norwegian monarchy intervened with a typical *divide et impera* policy, exploiting the Icelanders' dependence on Norwegian trade and shipping and working partly through the Norwegian-born bishops appointed from Trondheim after 1238, partly through Icelandic chieftains who became the king's liegemen in order to strengthen their position at home.

In 1238 the battle of Örlygsstaðir saw the families of *Haukdælir* and *Ásbirningar*, with their firmly established *ríki* in the western parts of Sunnlendingafjórðungur and Norðlendingafjórðungur, respectively, ranged against the *Sturlungar*, with their new and as yet incomplete *ríki* covering large parts of western Iceland and Eyjafjörður in the north. The *Sturlungar* were defeated and the *ríki* of the *Ásbirningar* came to include the entire Norðlendingafjórðungur, while Gizurr Thorvaldsson of the *Haukdælir* gained a dominant position in south and west Iceland.

After Snorri Sturluson, who was one of the leading *Sturlungar*, had been assassinated in 1241 for treason against the Norwegian king his property and *goðorð* were forfeit to the Crown.¹⁶ This provided King Håkon with a spring-board for intervening decisively in Icelandic politics. It appears that the Icelandic chieftains had to pay for the king's support by gradually handing over their *goðorð* to him. By about 1250 he had acquired nearly all of them and could decide who was to control them.

In 1258 Gizurr Thorvaldsson was appointed *jarl* with the duty of completing the subjection of Iceland to Norway. As he was not active enough, in 1261 the king sent his Norwegian liegeman Halvard Gullsko to speed up the process. Halvard put pressure on Earl Gizurr by encouraging the west Icelandic chieftain Hrafn Oddsson, who gained control of Snorri Sturluson's former *ríki* in Borgarfjörður, thus forcing Gizurr to act on the king's behalf, with the result that in 1262–4 the Icelanders placed themselves under the Norwegian king and promised him obedience and taxes.

Iceland was thus not won for the Norwegian crown by military force but by exploiting internal divisions and power struggles and by making most of the

¹⁵ The following representation of Icelandic political history has been contributed by M. Stefánsson.

¹⁶ M. Stefánsson, 'Drottinsvik Sturlu þórðarsonar', in *Sturlustefna* (Reykjavík, 1988), pp. 147–83.

chieftains the king's liegemen. This is reflected in the conditions the Icelanders included in the agreement of *Gamli sáttmáli* ('the old settlement') when they accepted Hákon Hákonsson as their king: the king was to let them enjoy peace and Icelandic law and to maintain sufficient shipping between Norway and Iceland.¹⁷

In 1247 the newly consecrated bishop of Greenland was sent from Norway to claim, on behalf of the king, submission and tax from the Scandinavian Greenlanders, and in 1261 Norwegian merchants brought back the news that the claim had been accepted. The Greenlanders' dependence on Norwegian shipping probably dictated their decision to join the Norwegian kingdom. Further south the Norwegian overlordship of the Hebrides and Man was in the early 1260s threatened by the invasion plans of the Scottish king Alexander III. This resulted in the large-scale but inconclusive naval expedition to Scottish waters after which King Hákon died in Orkney before Christmas 1263.

Hákon's son and successor, Magnus Law-mender, realised that the islands west of Scotland could not be controlled permanently by the Norwegian crown. By the treaty of Perth in 1266 they were ceded to the Scottish king on the condition that he would acknowledge and respect Norwegian sovereignty over Orkney and Shetland. Moreover, the Norwegian king was to receive 4,000 marks payable over four years and an additional sum of 100 marks annually in perpetuity. From Orkney northwards the so-called 'Norwegian dominion' (Norw. *Norgesveldet*) over the 'tributary lands' to the west continued after 1266; for Orkney and Shetland it lasted until the islands were pledged by the Danish–Norwegian king to the Scottish crown in 1468–9.

In spite of the active west-oriented policy it appears that other foreign interests were gaining priority towards the end of Hákon Hákonsson's reign. In the 1250s the Norwegian government sought to exploit the current internal weakness of the Danish kingdom in order to gain a foothold in Halland south of the Göta river, at that time the border between Denmark and Norway. The marriage of the later Magnus Law-mender to the Danish princess Ingeborg in 1261 (cf. Chapter 12(b)) was part of this policy, opening up the prospect of political connections with one of the rival branches of the Danish royal house.

By expanding his dominion south of the Göta river Hákon apparently hoped to control the seaway into the Baltic and the increasing trade flowing through it. His efforts met with little success, but they reveal, among other things, the growing importance of Norway's commercial relations with Lübeck and the other German ports of the Baltic which were to form the so-called Wendish

¹⁷ Ibid.

core-group of towns within the later Hanseatic League. In 1250 a treaty of peace and trade was concluded between Norway and Lübeck, by which King Håkon hoped to secure the import of Baltic grain and malt that was badly needed after some years of scarcity and conflict with Lübeck. In the following years German merchants started to winter in Bergen, sowing the seed for the Hanseatic trading station or *Kontor* that was later established there.

From the 1250s, then, relations with the north German ports were of growing interest for the Norwegian government, and were closely interwoven into inter-Nordic politics. The considerations of this south- and east-oriented policy were also to influence Norwegian relations with the two kingdoms of the British Isles. We shall return below to the inter-Scandinavian politics that led to the Nordic unions of the late Middle Ages (Chapter 12(e)).

The 'Norwegian Age' of Iceland

In Icelandic historical research the period from the early 1260s to about 1400 has been termed the 'Norwegian age' – *Norska öldin*.¹⁸ In his law of succession of 1273, incorporated in the Landlaw, King Magnus Law-mender laid down the principle that there should be one king over the whole Norwegian dominion, 'both inland and over the tributary lands'. This meant that Iceland was considered part of the Norwegian realm both constitutionally and administratively.

The law of the Free State, *Grágás*, was now replaced by new law-codes, *Járnsíða* (1271–3) and then *Jónsbók* (1281), corresponding to the two main stages in King Magnus' revision of Norwegian law. Both codes, and *Járnsíða* in particular, were influenced by Norwegian law, and *Jónsbók* with successive amendments (*réttarbætr*) remained Icelandic law for centuries. Even today some of *Jónsbók*'s enactments are in force. Bishop Árni Thorláksson's new church law for the diocese of Skálholt was accepted by the *Althing* in 1275, but it was never authorised by King Magnus who both at home and in Iceland maintained that such legislation was the joint responsibility of king and bishop. The church law of the Free State and Bishop Árni's church law were both in use until 1354 when the latter was given exclusive force by the king; a few of its provisions are still valid.

18 B. Þorsteinsson and S. Línal, 'Lögfesting konungsvalds', in S. Línal (ed.), *Saga Íslands*, 3 (Reykjavík, 1978), pp. 94–116; B. Þorsteinsson, *Island* (København, 1985), pp. 94–116; B. Þorsteinsson and G. Á. Grímsdóttir, 'Norska öldin', in S. Línal (ed.), *Saga Íslands*, 4 (Reykjavík, 1989), pp. 59–258. M. Stefánsson has contributed this subsection.

The Icelandic constitution had to be adapted to the sovereign position of the king.¹⁹ The functions of the *goðar* were taken over by royal officials who administered the king's monopoly of coercion. The new law-codes imposed punishments for manslaughter and other criminal offences, and violation of the rights of the king and his officials was considered treason. The result was peace in Iceland. The earldom ceased to exist after Gizurr's death in 1268; after that one or two royal commissioners governed the country. From 1320, and probably somewhat earlier, they were called *hirðstjórar*, leaders of the king's liegemen in Iceland. They were supported by Norwegian-type *sýslumenn*, who received the king's taxes, prosecuted offences, appointed men to the local law-courts, and exercised the king's executive power. The *sýslumenn* were remunerated by part of the royal taxes and fines.

Jónsbók prescribed that there should be one *sýslumaðr* in each quarter (*fjórðungr*) of the country, each of them served by four prosecutors (*sóknarmenn*). A tax roll from 1311 mentions nine districts for tax collection, probably identical with the administrative districts of the *sýslumenn* that then existed, with borders that were partly the same as those of the *ríki* in the last decades of the Free State Period.

The Icelandic law-speaker was replaced by a royal lawman, again after the Norwegian pattern; from 1283 there were two. Following the Norwegian *lawthing* model the law council (*lǫgrétta*) of the *Althing* became a court of law with thirty-six members, replacing the earlier Fifth Court and quarter courts; when passing sentences it consisted of six, twelve or thirty-six assessors (*lǫgréttumenn*) depending on the importance of the cases. As participants in the *Althing* the *thing-menn* of the *goðar* were replaced by Norwegian-type *nefndarmenn* ('appointed men'), selected by the *sýslumenn* from the twelve *thing*-districts into which the country was now divided.

The Icelandic chieftains became royal liegemen, constituting a service aristocracy within the framework of the Icelandic *hirð*. New men and new families came to the fore, although the royal officials belonged mostly to the old families. The change of titles in Norway in 1277, when the two upper ranks of the *hirð* began to be called barons and knights and have the right to bear the title of *herra* (Lord, Sir), also applied to the Icelandic aristocracy.

Though the Icelanders were largely loyal to the monarchy they were careful to guard their rights. Among other things they reacted against the appointment

¹⁹ Þorsteinsson and Línal, 'Lögfesting', pp. 17–108; J. V. Sigurðsson, 'The Icelandic aristocracy after the fall of the Free State', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 20 (1995), pp. 153–66.

of Norwegians as *hirðstjórar* and *sýslumenn*, and made it a condition for swearing allegiance to King Hákon V in 1302 that all *sýslumenn* and lawmen should be Icelanders and descend from 'the families who gave up the chieftaincies in the past'. After that these officials were usually Icelanders while the *hirðstjórar* were either Norwegians or Icelanders.

The decades following the submission to the Norwegian crown were dominated by a sharp controversy concerning the control of the local churches and their property, particularly the richest *staðir* (cf. Chapter 8(d)).²⁰ The goal of Bishop Árni Thorláksson of Skálholt (1269–98) was to deprive the magnates administering these joint institutions of church and farm of every right of possession to which they claimed to be entitled. Árni was supported by Archbishop Jon Raude (1268–82) who was, however, driven into exile by the regency council of King Eirik Magnusson, and died there. The Icelandic dispute was settled by compromise in Norway in 1297. Proper *staðir*, consisting of farms owned completely by the churches standing on their land, were subjected to the bishop's authority while so-called farmers' churches, on farms of which half or more were owned by laymen, were to remain in secular hands. Bishop Árni died before he had put the settlement into effect but his successor is reported to have given the *staðir* in the bishopric of Skálholt to the clergy in 1305. Apparently, these institutions gradually became ecclesiastical benefices, given to clerics or secular favourites for terms.

The conflict over the *staðir* thus ended in a considerable victory for the Church whose power, influence, and wealth increased throughout the late Middle Ages; the Icelandic bishops now gradually acquired the authority they were supposed to have according to Canon Law. The secular aristocracy, for its part, united against the Church during the dispute and put old internal rivalries aside. As the aristocracy was brought together within the framework of the *hirð* its class consciousness was increasing. Since *staðir* no longer had a key political role, larger farms with farmers' churches became the main centres of the aristocracy, often giving rise to new families who were, in the old tradition, named after the farms.

The personal union between Norway and Sweden from 1319 meant that Iceland, not being particularly important financially, was increasingly peripheral to royal power, a development that was reinforced when Bergen lost its position as the main royal residence after King Magnus Eriksson came of age

20 M. Stefánsson, 'Frá goðakirkju til biskupskirkju', in Lindal (ed.), *Saga Íslands*, 3, pp. 109–257; Sigurðsson, 'The Icelandic aristocracy'; M. Stefánsson, *Staðir og staðamál: Studier i islandske egenkirkelige og beneficalrettslige forliold i middelalderen*, *Skrifter*, 4, Historisk Institutt, Bergen, 2000.

at the beginning of the 1330s. In 1340 Magnus ordered that the royal revenue from Iceland and the other tributary lands to the west was to go directly to his personal representative, not to the royal treasury in Bergen.²¹

When, in 1350, Magnus shared the Norwegian kingdom with his son, Håkon VI, he reserved for himself the royal revenue from Iceland, Føroyar, Shetland and Hålogaland (north Norway). The rich fisheries led him to try to increase the number of Icelandic tax-payers and he levied duties on ships coming to Bergen from Iceland. From 1354 there was a financially motivated arrangement by which so-called *leiguhirðstjórar* (*hirðstjórar* 'at rent') held Iceland as a fief (*lén*) for a certain number of years in return for an annual payment. The result was a stricter political and economic regime, but it was abolished when the Norwegian *hirðstjóri* was killed in 1361. Instead, the *hirðstjórar* received a fixed share of the royal revenue which was after 1350 again administered by the royal treasury in Bergen as a separate royal income.

Throughout the fourteenth century the Icelanders continued to communicate with the royal government and foreign countries through Bergen. Even after the town's monopoly of foreign trade with Iceland was lost in the first half of the fifteenth century, the Icelanders continued their contact with the counsellors of the realm in Bergen, and in Trondheim as well.

21 For the following, see K. Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad: Fra opphavet til 1536 (Bergen bys historie, 1, Bergen, 1982)*; G. A. Blom, *Magnus Eriksson og Island: Til belysning av periferi og sentrum i nordisk 1300-talls historie (Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab, Skrifter, 2, 1983)*; M. Stefánsson, 'Bergen – Islands første hovedstad', in I. Øye (ed.), *Kjøpstad og rikssentrum (Onsdagskvelder i Bryggens Museum, 2, Bergen, 1986)*, pp. 70–87.

12 (d) Sweden under the dynasty of the Folkungs

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The account of the early history of Swedish political developments in Chapter 8(e) ends in the middle of the thirteenth century when Sweden began to take shape as a high medieval European kingdom. The following section is devoted to the development of that kingdom until the downfall of the Folkung dynasty in the 1360s.¹

A new dynasty

When King Erik Eriksson died childless in 1250 his nephew Valdemar, son of the factual ruler Earl Birger and still a minor, was chosen to succeed him. Thus was established what has traditionally, but incorrectly, been called the dynasty of the 'Folkungs' (Swedish *folkungar*). The focal point of the realm was in the course of being transferred from the provinces of Västergötland and Östergötland to the Mälars valley. There, the uprising led by the aristocratic clan of the real *folkungar* had been crushed in 1247, an event that speeded up the transition from personal military service to taxation of the peasant community of Uppland (cf. Chapter 8(e)). In 1248 a papal legation had led to a significant agreement between the temporal and spiritual powers. Secular cathedral chapters were

1 For Swedish (and Finnish) history c. 1250–1360, see S. Tunberg, *Äldre medeltiden (Sveriges historia till våra dagar, 2, Stockholm, 1926)*; Y. Brilioth, *Den senare medeltiden 1274–1521* (H. Holmquist and H. Pleijel (eds.), *Svenska kyrkans historia, 2* (Uppsala, 1941); J. Rosén, *Tiden före 1718* (*Svensk historia, 1*, Stockholm, 1962); *Den svenska historien, 1–2* (Stockholm, 1966); I. Andersson, *A History of Sweden* (London, 1955); Y. Blomstedt et al. (eds.), *Suomen historia, 2* (Espoo, 1985); M. Norrbäck (ed.), *Finlands historia, 1* (Ekenäs, 1992); E. Jutikkala and K. Pirinen, *A History of Finland* (New York, 1990).

For surveys of recent research, see T. Lindkvist, 'Swedish medieval society: Previous research and recent developments', *Scand. J. History, 4* (1979), pp. 253–68; S. Suvanto, 'Medieval studies in Finland', *ibid.*, pp. 287–304.

For the sources, see L.-A. Norborg, *Källor till Sveriges historia* (Lund, 1972); I. Andersson, *Källstudier till Sveriges historia 1230–1436* (Lund, 1928); G. Paulsson (ed.), *Annales suecici medii aevi* (*Bibliotheca Historica Lundensis*, Lund, 1974); H. Schück, *Rikets brev och register (Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Riksarkivet, 4, Stockholm, 1976)*.

now established with the support of king and aristocracy. Uppsala's position as the centre of the Swedish church was thereby strengthened, and in the following century the archbishop and his chapter supported the royal power. About the same time Earl Birger had led a successful military action in Finland and subjugated the Tavasts, who, from their central position in the country, had controlled the coastal regions to the west and south.

As Valdemar's guardian Birger apparently ruled with full royal authority, repressing another rebellion by magnates in 1252 and retaining power after his son came of age. A transition to a more advanced form of political organisation was now clearly beginning in terms of taxation, administration, military apparatus and internal peace legislation. The monarchy also encouraged the growth of trade and towns, as witnessed by royal charters for Lübeck and Hamburg, intended to promote their merchants' Swedish trade and settlement, and by the appearance of Stockholm in 1252 as a fortified city especially favoured by the royal power.² Birger's foreign policy can be followed through the marriages he contracted for himself and his children. His daughter was married to the Norwegian co-ruler King Håkon the Young. His son Valdemar's marriage to the daughter of the Danish king Erik Plovpenning initiated friendly relations with one of the discontented branches of the Danish royal house.

After Birger's death in 1266 Valdemar assumed full royal power. His brother Magnus succeeded to the position of *jarl* with the modern title of duke. Though little is known of the years immediately following it is clear that Magnus successfully worked to undermine Valdemar's authority. Finally, he and his brother Erik rebelled openly with the support of the Danish king Erik Klipping, who supplied the mounted army which defeated Valdemar in the battle of Hova in 1275. Valdemar was forced to renounce the crown and Magnus was made king in the customary manner. He was able to ward off Valdemar's attempts to regain the crown, first through the mediation of the Norwegian king Magnus, Valdemar's brother-in-law, and then with the support of Erik Klipping. He also had to subdue a new uprising of the *folkungar*. In the face of these challenges he had the full support of the Church which took the king's person under its protection.³

2 N. Ahnlund, *Stockholms historia före Gustav Vasa* (Stockholm, 1953); K. Kumlien, *Sverige och hanseaterna* (Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar, 86, Stockholm and Lund, 1953).

3 For the internal feuds, see J. Rosén, 'Tronskiftet i Sverige 1275', *Scandia*, 18 (1947), pp. 202–39; S. Söderlind, 'Konkurrensen mellan Birgerssönerna', *Historisk tidskrift*, 79 (Stockholm, 1959), pp. 369–400. For King Magnus' reign in general, see H. Schück, 'Magnus Birgersson', *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexicon*, 24 (1982–4), pp. 647–59.

By the end of the 1270s Magnus' dominion had been consolidated. This was marked by the statutes of Alsnö (1280 or possibly 1279) and Skänninge (1284) and his charter in favour of the Church (1281). At Skänninge the succession to the throne was established: Birger, the eldest of Magnus' young sons, was acclaimed *rex junior* while his brother Erik was nominated duke of Sweden.

The following years brought a number of successes for Magnus' foreign policy. The good relations with the Danish royal house were revived through a double marriage alliance; by contrast, relations with the Norwegians were cooler and when Magnus was entrusted with the arbitration between Norway and the German towns in 1285 he decided in favour of the towns. The independence of Visby was now sacrificed by its fellow Hanseatic towns so that Visby and Gotland were successively (1285 and 1288) tied more closely to the Swedish kingdom. In this connection and in dealing with domestic political agitators the *lex julia majestatis* was invoked; thus Roman Law, previously unknown in Sweden, was introduced.⁴

Magnus died in 1290 on Visingsö, the ancient royal seat in Lake Vättern, having previously chosen his burial site among the Franciscans in Stockholm, the new royal city. His relatively short reign was already regarded by his near contemporaries as having been of revolutionary significance. No other medieval Swedish monarch enjoyed such internal and external authority. Magnus was conceived of as legislator and protector of the peasantry; the latter function earned him the nickname 'Barnlock' (Swedish *Ladulås*). He even acquired a reputation for sanctity.

Magnus' system of government soon broke down as his circle of advisers passed away. While his reign is relatively well known, thanks to the preservation of his archive in the cathedral of Uppsala and the fact that his statutes were incorporated in law-codes, there is little evidence for the succeeding minority and first years of his son Birger's rule. It is, however, apparent that ecclesiastical influence on the government of the kingdom was reduced. The leading political figure, occupying a position comparable to that of the earlier *jarl*, was Marshal Torgils Knutsson. Charters, privileges and legislation show that there was a reaction against the alliance between Crown and Church that had characterised Magnus' regime.

A return to an earlier political pattern can also be seen in the eastern policy that was now actively pursued. Its ultimate goal was to control the river Neva and thereby the Hanseatic trade with Novgorod. In 1293 the stronghold of

4 E. Hjärke, *Fornsvenska lagstadganden: Tolkningar och sammanställningar* (Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundets i Uppsala Årsbok, 1949–50, Uppsala, 1950).

Viborg (Viipuri) was established on the Karelian coast of the Gulf of Finland and for a short time Kexholm at Ladoga was occupied. A new major action by sea led to the establishment of the stronghold of Landskrona at the mouth of the Neva, but ended in catastrophe (1301). Viborg remained the eastern Swedish outpost for three centuries and Karelia was for one and a half centuries divided between Sweden and Novgorod.

Legal conditions under the first Folkungs

Before the dynasty of Folkungs established itself law and justice were largely seen as a concern of each land or province, based on custom and precedent and with no validity elsewhere. There were, however, no profound differences between the legal systems of the various provinces. In legal proceedings formal proof by sworn witnesses nominated by one of the parties was slowly replaced by material proof provided by a group of people similar to a jury that was appointed by the judge (Swedish *nämnd*). Fines were the usual punishment for crimes which did not compromise the victim's honour.

Our knowledge of the provincial laws is incomplete.⁵ The introduction of a general rural code of law in the mid-fourteenth century, the so-called 'Land-law', made the old regional codes obsolete with the exception of the church laws. Only a few manuscripts are preserved, the oldest being a fragment from about 1250. Certain codes are only preserved in a fragmentary state and others are merely known to have existed. Even less is known about royal legislation. The statutes of Alsnö (1279–80) and Skänninge (1284) are only known because they were incorporated in a manuscript of the Law of Västergötland. Almost all royal town charters have been lost.

The Law of Västergötland is the first provincial code known to have been put into writing in Sweden: shortly after 1220. It has no trace of royal legislation. This is consistent with the tradition that Earl Birger was the instigator of such legislation above the provincial level, in the form of provisions preserving the peace of the land, commonly called *edsöre* ('oath-confirmed') legislation because the king, along with the great men of the realm, swore an oath to put it into effect. In the statute of Alsnö King Magnus confirmed his father's strict measures against violations of the home, women, the Church, the *thing*,

5 The medieval Swedish laws have been edited by C. J. Schlyter, *Samling af Sveriges gamla lagar*, 1–13 (Stockholm and Lund, 1827–77). Translation into modern Swedish with commentaries can be found in Å. Holmbäck and E. Wessén (eds.), *Svenska landskapslagar*, 1–5 (Stockholm, 1933–46). A recent controversial attempt at an overall view of the provincial laws is E. Sjöholm, *Sveriges medeltidslagar: Europeisk rättstradition i politisk omvandling* (*Rättshistoriskt bibliotek*, 41, Lund, 1988).

etc. Such crimes led, in addition to the ordinary punishment, to outlawry throughout the whole kingdom, which could, however, be commuted to a fine of 40 marks paid to the king. The same provisions are found in the Law of Östergötland from the end of the thirteenth century. The codes of Västergötland and Östergötland were not sanctioned by the king but royal decrees could be incorporated in both these and other provincial codes when received in the various provinces. Gotland was an exception: its law, written down before the end of the thirteenth century, shows no traces of royal legislation.

The Alsnö statute demonstrates the wealth of issues that were regulated under oath in royal assemblies of prelates and magnates. The first provision deals with the right of hospitality which the new bands of knights had made a source of conflict. The peasants' duty to give hospitality in return for compensation was confirmed but enforced hospitality was prohibited. The second provision confirmed the peace regulations of Earl Birger and the third dealt with exemption from royal taxation. The fourth and last provision was directed against injustices committed by royal servants against the peasants.

The two last provisions were entirely within the king's field of authority and were not incorporated in the provincial laws. The same applies to the entire statute of Skänninge whose provisions were also established under oath. They dealt with the special peace surrounding the person of the king, the permitted size of the retinues brought to royal assemblies, punishment by outlawry and confiscation of property for conspiracy against the king, and finally the king's disciplinary right over knights and men-at-arms and his duty to protect their families.

Legislation under oath appears to have ceased with the death of King Magnus. Under the following regency legislation was of a different nature. In 1296 the Law of Uppland was authorised in the name of the young King Birger Magnusson. The letter of confirmation which introduces the law describes its genesis. On the initiative of the 'lawman' or law-speaker Birger Petersson, a group of men wise in the law – including the dean of Uppsala cathedral – was summoned to amalgamate the three differing legal customs of Uppland and include new provisions; their work was then accepted by the *landsting*. In its motivation for legislation the preface that follows shows influence from the Danish Law of Jylland issued in 1241.

The Law of Uppland with its fusion of popular and learned culture held great significance for later legislation and the development of the Swedish written language. Its 'King's Section' (Swedish *konungabalk*) prescribes the customary method of electing a new king, his traditional progress through the provinces (the so-called *Erikskata*), and his coronation; not until the completion

of all these ceremonies does he possess full authority. Then follow the decrees of peace from Earl Birger's time. Finally, the military *leding* obligations towards the king are formulated. In its view of society the Law of Uppland is retrospective; a privileged nobility is not even mentioned.

Finland's legal customs before 1300 are scarcely known. In the succeeding period the ancient Law of Hälsingland (across the Gulf of Bothnia) seems to have been used by the Swedish population in the south-western coastal region of Finland while unwritten legal customs dictated the life of the Finnish population.

The establishment of a privileged upper stratum

The third provision of the Alsnö statute, concerning freedom (Swedish *frälse*) from royal taxation, is one of the most debated points of Swedish medieval history.⁶ Public duties in the old society consisted of personal contributions: at the *thing*, when the king was visiting, and on his maritime expeditions; an upper stratum was not identified by formal privileges. There is, however, a glimpse of such a stratum in an old provision of the Law of Östergötland: special fines of honour were to be paid to a lord for the killing of his unfree steward or his 'man'. Thus, even before the mid-thirteenth century, the king, the *jarl*, bishops and chieftains could have 'men' tied to themselves by oaths of fealty.

The same type of relationship is referred to in the Alsnö statute when the king declares that 'those who follow us with counsel and help shall have more honour'. Consequently, his own men and those of his brother Bengt, together with all their subjects, were to be free from all royal right, as were the bishops' men-at-arms and all men who served with a fighting horse 'whoever they may serve'. The king's 'men' probably included both the magnates of the realm, bound to him by oath, and the hired warriors of his retinue. The expression 'whoever they may serve' points to lords of fighting men who were themselves, like the bishops, intended to be free from all royal right. Such 'right' probably included both various taxes and the king's third of legal fines.

The basis for the Alsnö provision was the general commutation of personal services into impersonal taxes. This was a slow process that would hardly apply to those who had the right to special fines of honour and their men; tax

6 The best survey is J. Rosén, 'Frälse', *KLNM*, 4 (1959), cols. 670–93. See also C.-G. Andræ, *Kyrka och frälse i Sverige under äldre medeltid* (*Studia historica Upsaliensia*, 4, Uppsala, 1960). For a concrete illustration, see B. Fritz, 'En folkungatida storman och hans olika roller', in *Studier tillägnade Herman Schück* 5 / 4 1985 (Stockholm, 1985), pp. 85–114.

was traditionally regarded as something inferior whereas personal service was honourable. By renouncing royal rights King Magnus tied to himself all those, higher and lower, who could lend him political and military support. The motivating key word is 'honour', and so it was when the Skänninge statute of 1284 limited the size of retinues that could be brought to meetings summoned by the king: from the forty men of the king's brother to the two men allowed lesser freemen.

The freedom of ecclesiastical institutions and clerics from royal right was also finally established in the reign of Magnus Birgersson. The kings Sverker Karlsson and Johan Sverkersson had, in 1200 and 1219, assured the Church that it would have jurisdiction over members of the clergy and be free from contributions to the Crown. It is, however, unlikely that the latter condition was observed during the next half century of governmental shifts, rearrangement of contributions to the Crown, and large transfers of property to the Church. It was Magnus Birgersson's violent accession to power that gave the Church its opportunity. At his coronation in 1276 Magnus promised to satisfy the Church and he fulfilled his promise at the coronation of his queen in 1281. The Church was then exempted from all ordinary taxes on property which it possessed at that time, and the royal part of legal fines from its subjects was assigned to the bishop. The privileges were obviously given in return for the ecclesiastical support of Magnus' regime, but another factor was the papal demand for a tithe of crusade from the Church.

It is hard to establish when personal service was commuted to taxation; there is no contemporary evidence for the change. Little is known about local administration before the mid-thirteenth century. Presumably, it functioned through a system of royal manors where products stemming from the king's various rights and properties were collected. The succeeding development can be seen as two separate but interacting processes.⁷

First, there was from the mid-thirteenth century a considerable build-up of royal strongholds garrisoned with mounted professional warriors, such as the castles of Stockholm, Nyköping, Stegeborg (outside Söderköping), Kalmar and Borgholm (on Öland), all along the east coast. A citadel was also erected in the south-west at Lödöse, and in Finland there was one outside Åbo as well as the strongholds of Tavastehus and Viborg. Such points of support were intended to serve both the defence against external enemies and the maintenance of

⁷ E. Lönnroth, *Statsmakt och statsfinans i det medeltida Sverige* (Göteborgs högskolas årsskrift 1940, 3, Göteborg, 1940); B. Fritz, *Hus, land och län: Förvaltningen i Sverige 1250-1434*, 1-2 (*Stockholm Studies in History*, 16, 18, Stockholm, 1972-3).

internal order. How were the resources required to erect and maintain them obtained?

The solution lay in the parallel commutation into set taxes of the personal obligations to the king connected with the *leding* system and his right to hospitality. Peasant society was no longer regarded as a military factor; it was rather to be exploited to provide the economic basis for a more up-to-date military system. For this purpose, fiscal districts were assigned to support the new strongholds while other districts remained directly under the king or were assigned to members of the royal family. By and by, the districts supporting the strongholds were transformed into territorial administrative units, so-called *län* (fiefs). Thus, much of Uppland was placed under the castle of Stockholm and the coastal region of Småland was under the castle of Kalmar. There is little trace in the sources of the severe conflicts that would have been expected to follow. A royal letter to the peasantry of Öland in 1281 aimed at subduing discontent and regulating duties; it is evident that contributions of individuals and groups had been adjusted to the needs of the *castrum* (Borgholm). The peasantry of Hälsingland was thanked by the king for the extra taxes it had taken upon itself in order to pay for expensive warriors.

By exempting the great lords and their 'men' from such taxation and from the royal third of the fines in return for qualified military service the king formally laid the foundations for a secular nobility. The corresponding freedom given to ecclesiastical institutions and members of the clergy created a privileged spiritual estate. The taxes and duties from which they were exempted – and how much land it affected – was not made entirely clear. Conflicts must have arisen over the increasing demands of the Crown and discontent must have been rife both among those left to carry the burden and those on whom extra dues were imposed despite their exemptions.

The changes traced above were all instigated by the monarchy in order to create a kingdom of contemporary west European character, a project which required organised cooperation among the Crown, the Church and the secular aristocracy. Assemblies of prelates and magnates, who were beginning to take part in the governance of the realm together with the king, and of which there are glimpses already in the late twelfth century, now acquired a firmer structure and were termed 'courts' or 'talks' (later Swedish *herredag* – assembly of lords).⁸

8 K. G. Westman, *Svenska rådets historia till år 1306* (Uppsala, 1904); H. Jägerstad, *Hovdag och råd under äldre medeltid: Den statsrättsliga utvecklingen i Sverige från Karl Sverkerssons regering till Magnus Erikssons regeringstillträde (1160–1331)* (Stockholm, 1948); J. Rosén, 'Hovdag och råd', *Scandia*, 19 (1948–49), pp. 299–320; K. E. Löfqvist, 'De svenska drots- och marskämbetena under 1200- och 1300-talen', *Vetenskaps-Societetens i Lund årsbok*,

The statutes of Alsnö and of Skänninge mention a smaller circle of the king's most trusted men, bishops and magnates, notably from the Mälare provinces and Östergötland, and the seneschal (*drots*), marshal (*marsk*), and chancellor appear as royal officials. Preparing for the possibility that he would die before his eldest son came of age King Magnus instituted a regency council with clerical and secular members that was to be cooptive; how this was carried out in practice is not clear. At any rate, the regency council can be seen as the origin of an institutionalised royal council which would later acquire an autonomous role as 'council of the realm'. Nevertheless, the degree to which the governmental system of the 1280s depended on the person of the monarch is striking; the political organisation of the kingdom was still undeveloped and unstable.

In some respects Swedish society at the end of the thirteenth century may be said to have become feudal. It should, however, be noted that the Swedish form of feudalism involved freedom from the recently arisen dues to the Crown, not a transfer of royal rights.

Political development after 1300

The history of the monarchy of the Folkungs after 1300 is comparatively well known through the remains of the archives of various regimes, through law codes and royal letters, and, up to 1319, through *Erikskrönikan*, the rhapsodic and biased rhymed chronicle about Duke Erik Magnusson, directed to his young son, King Magnus.⁹ The evidence for administration and taxation is, however, still sparse.

At the start of the fourteenth century King Birger Magnusson was in his twenties but Marshal Torgils Knutsson was still factual regent.¹⁰ Birger's coronation in 1302 did not immediately change this situation. At the same time his brother Erik took possession of his Swedish duchy and his younger brother Valdemar became duke of Finland. Torgils Knutsson seems to have consolidated his position: the repressive stance towards the Church was sharpened, and the friendship with the Norwegian king Håkon V confirmed by the betrothal, in 1302, of Håkon's only legitimate child, a young daughter named Ingebjørg, to Duke Erik.

1936 (Lund, 1936), pp. 13–56; H. Schück, 'Kansler och capella regis under folkungatiden', *Historisk tidskrift*, 81 (Stockholm, 1963), pp. 133–87.

9 I. Andersson, *Erikskrönikans författare* (*Svenska Akademiens minnesteckningar*, Stockholm, 1958). Most recent edition of the chronicle by S. B. Jansson, *Erikskrönikan* (Stockholm, 1986).

10 J. Rosén, *Striden mellan Birger Magnusson och hans bröder: Studier i nordisk politisk historia 1302–1319* (Lund, 1939).

In Duke Erik a dynamic player appeared on the Scandinavian political scene. His lust for power soon brought him into conflict with the marshal and the king – always with his brother Valdemar as an associate. The dukes left the country in 1304, to return a year later. By now, an intricate game with his future father-in-law King Håkon and his brother-in-law King Erik Menved of Denmark had brought Duke Erik two strategically situated fiefs: the Norwegian district of Elvesysle (south Bohuslän) north of the river Göta älv and the Danish district of north Halland to the south. Both had previously been held by the Danish outlaws convicted of the murder of King Erik Klipping. Duke Erik skilfully managed to mobilise the enemies of Marshal Torgils, and King Birger was persuaded to sacrifice his powerful protector: Torgils was found guilty of lese-majesty and executed in 1305.

In the following year the dukes turned on their brother. Birger was seized in a coup at Håtuna in Uppland ('the Håtuna game') and imprisoned. King Erik Menved intervened on his behalf with diplomatic and military means while the dukes sought support from King Erik's enemies. The peace that was finally concluded at Helsingborg in 1310 involved a division of the Swedish kingdom: Birger retained control of Södermanland, Närke and Östergötland together with Gotland and the district of Viborg in Finland, while the dukes received the rest of the realm in fief with full royal authority and right of inheritance; their oath of fealty to King Birger was a mere formality. A subsequent agreement between the ducal brothers made Valdemar ruler of the eastern half of their common principality while Erik took charge of the western half bordering on his Norwegian and Danish fiefs, creating a coherent dominion around the point where the borders of the three Scandinavian kingdoms met.

In 1317 the dukes' luck finally ran out. They were treacherously imprisoned by King Birger when visiting the castle of Nyköping ('the banquet of Nyköping') and perished in prison the next year. Their supporters rose up all over the realm and Birger had to seek refuge with his Danish brother-in-law. His attempt to recapture his kingdom with the latter's help failed utterly. The question of succession was now acute, all the more so when King Håkon died in May 1319, leaving his three-year-old grandson Magnus, Duke Erik's son, as the heir to the Norwegian throne. King Birger's son of the same name, who had at a tender age been acclaimed his successor, was imprisoned and soon executed.

On 8 July 1319 a ceremony was arranged on Mora meadow near Uppsala, the time-honoured scene of Swedish royal elections. Here Magnus Eriksson was elected king. On his behalf, the prelates and magnates present gave an assurance of lawful government; they also promised loyalty to the king on

behalf of the people. The promise was received on behalf of the king by the *drots* Matts Kettilmundsson, previously the leading man of the dukes. The election of 1319 marks an epoch in Swedish constitutional history, and we shall return to the 'Charter of Liberties' issued on that occasion.

Once again a long-lasting regency had been established with a key position for the council of the realm in which the prelates were again allowed a prominent role. The new regime faced a complicated external situation. Immediately before the meeting at Mora a Swedish delegation to Oslo had reached agreement with the Norwegian council of the realm on the personal union that would be the unplanned consequence of the election of Magnus as king of Sweden and his acclamation as hereditary king of Norway. The agreement between the two parties was aimed at regulating and keeping to a minimum the joint concerns of the two kingdoms during Magnus' minority. Hence, the new Swedish regime did not face serious problems in the west.

However, difficulties arose from the policies of the king's young mother, Duchess Ingebjørg, and her circle which included some of her late husband's supporters. From Varberg in north Halland they followed Duke Erik's example by seeking to establish a south Scandinavian dominion at the cost of the seriously weakened Danish kingdom. As part of this policy a marriage was arranged between King Magnus' sister Eufemia and the young prince of Mecklenburg, Albrecht, which proved to have far-reaching consequences. In a meeting in Skara 1322 the Swedish council disassociated itself from Ingebjørg and her circle. Matts Kettilmundsson resigned from his leadership to become governor of Finland.

To the east problems were increasing. The recovery of Viborg, previously part of King Birger's dominion, proved a long-drawn-out and expensive undertaking. The competition with Novgorod over Karelia was not resolved until the peace of Nöteborg (Oreshek) in 1323, by which Novgorod, which had problems with other neighbours, gave up south-west Karelia with Viborg. The border was drawn from Systerbäck (Sestroretsk) on the Gulf of Finland in a north-northwesterly direction with ever more widely spaced boundary points through Savo until it reached the 'sea'. Conflict was later to arise over which sea was meant by this, the Gulf of Bothnia or the northern Arctic Ocean. The present historical view favours the former. The northern part of the border was drawn roughly through unsettled territory and the land beyond it was to be open for hunting, fishing and trading by people from the kingdoms of Sweden and Norway and the republic of Novgorod. Matters were complicated by the lack of a corresponding border on the other side of the

Gulf of Bothnia where Swedish colonisation was now vigorously encouraged by the authorities.¹¹

Magnus Eriksson came of age in 1331–2. According to the law he only attained full royal authority after his traditional tour of the realm and coronation, which took place in 1335–6. In 1335 he also married Blanche, daughter of the count of Namur. The expansionist policy at the cost of the Danish kingdom was continued and in 1332 a deputation from the estates of Skåne, headed by the archbishop of Lund, acclaimed Magnus king. A subsequent agreement with the count of Holstein, to whom Skåne and Blekinge had been mortgaged by the Danish king, led the count to renounce his rights for 34,000 marks of silver.

Throughout the next decade it was an open question whether the Swedish expansion would continue. However, in 1343 peace was finally negotiated with the new Danish monarch Valdemar IV, by which Valdemar ceded Skåne, Blekinge and South Halland to Magnus and the Swedish kingdom. In the same year King Magnus took a decisive step towards dissolving the personal union between Sweden and Norway by having his elder son Erik elected king of Sweden, including Skåne, and his younger son Håkon acclaimed king of Norway. Erik was to assume rule at his father's death whereas Håkon was to take over the Norwegian throne when he came of age.

In his rule Magnus associated himself expressly with his famous grandfather and namesake, but his personal achievement is hard to evaluate. In his early years of personal rule he worked energetically in the fields of legislation, privileges and administration. He continued the expansionist eastern policies conducted by the regents of his uncle and himself. In 1348–51 he went to war under the pretext of a 'crusade' against Novgorod with the aim of controlling the Neva and the trade of the republic. This proved to be a costly and unsuccessful enterprise, which damaged his reputation. The boundary defined by the peace of Nöteborg lasted – even if disputed – for another two and a half centuries.

There was growing opposition to Magnus among the Swedish upper classes – an eloquent spokeswoman was Birgitta, daughter of the Uppland lawman Birger Petersson. Discontent was caused both by Magnus' political and financial difficulties and by his system of government. The two concepts of government which clashed can be illustrated by the Augustinian ideal of the Christian king set forth in Birgitta's 'revelations' (see Chapter 15), and by the very different ideal expounded in the treatise *Um styrilse konunga ok*

¹¹ J. Gallén (and J. Lind), *Nöteborgsfreden och Finlands medeltida östgräns*, 1–2 (*Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland*, 427:1–2, Helsinki, 1968, 1991).

höfðinga (On the government of kings and chieftains), a Swedish adaptation of *De regimine principum* by Aegidius Romanus which was probably written with a view to the education of Magnus' sons, and presented hereditary, absolute monarchy as an ideal form of government.¹²

The discontent led to an open revolt in 1356.¹³ The young Erik Magnusson was put forward as anti-king, and in the following year Magnus had to accept his son as ruler of the greater part of the realm including Skåne, with the council of the realm as the cohesive element in the splintered kingdom. The early death of King Erik in 1359 led to a settlement, made in a meeting with extraordinarily broad social participation, between Magnus and his opponents on their terms. A new internal crisis followed when Skåne and Gotland were lost to King Valdemar in 1360–1. Magnus was deposed and his son Håkon, now king of Norway, was elected king of Sweden in 1362.

Håkon accepted his father as co-ruler. Together they carried out a reorientation in foreign affairs by turning away from the north German princes and towns and approaching their previously successful enemy, King Valdemar. The new alliance involved acknowledging the loss of Skåne, and was consolidated by the marriage between Håkon and Valdemar's young daughter Margrethe in 1363. The leaders of the party which had previously supported Erik and Håkon now turned to Duke Albrecht of Mecklenburg with an offer of the Swedish crown to his son Albrecht, Duke Erik's grandson. With Hanseatic support the Mecklenburgers invaded from over the sea, Stockholm opened its gates, the native enemies of the kings joined the invaders, and Albrecht was legally elected king. Magnus and Håkon continued their struggle for the Swedish crown but suffered a severe defeat in the following year; Magnus was captured and Håkon had to withdraw to his Norwegian kingdom. This was effectively the end of the Folkung era in Swedish history.

Legislation, taxation and royal finances

When King Magnus Eriksson rode his *Eriksgata* in 1335 (Chapter 8(e)), legislative activity was revived with reference to the legislation of his grandfather Magnus Birgersson. Magnus' known major statutes were promulgated at aristocratic assemblies in Skänninge (1335), Uppsala (1344) and Tälje (1345). Like the statutes of his grandfather they were in the first place addressed to the privileged

12 L. Moberg (ed.), *Konungastyrelsen* (Samlingar utgivna av Svenska Fornskrift-Sällskapet, 69:1–2, Uppsala, 1984).

13 L. Sjöstedt, *Krisen i det svensk-skånska väldet 1356–1359* (Lund, 1954); S. Engström, *Bo Jonsson*, 1 (Uppsala, 1935).

secular nobility, and dealt with internal peace, hospitality, the sizes of mounted retinues, protection of knights' widows and fatherless children. There were also new provisions for the regular review of the military equipment of 'free-born' men and for the establishment, in every legal district, of a royal commission to judge offences against the royal decrees.

This legislation was carried out in cooperation with the council of the realm and formed the prelude to the section concerned with the king in the Landlaw that was to replace the legal codes of the individual provinces.¹⁴ Little is known about the making of the Landlaw. Work on it was being carried out in 1347 when five bishops made a formal protest: the new law was not to violate Canon Law or the statutes, privileges and customs enjoyed by the Church. Consequently, the completed code had no Church Section, which meant that the church laws of the older provincial codes remained in force.

The King's Section of the Landlaw is the first one. The other sections are different in that they contain few entirely new regulations; they are mainly based on the laws of Östergötland and Uppland. The introduction throughout the entire kingdom of the office of the district judge (Swedish *härads hövding*), known from the earlier laws of Götaland, was particularly important. These judges were drawn from the local nobility whose position was thus strengthened.

A royal charter of confirmation similar to that of the Law of Uppland does not appear to have been issued for the Landlaw. In the Mälars provinces, Östergötland and Dalarna it came into effect in 1352–3. In Finland, which had in 1362 been acknowledged as a separate legal district with the obligation of participating in royal elections, it was not certainly in force until 1379. In Västergötland, which was separated from the rest of Sweden in the Mecklenburg era, the Landlaw did not apply until 1391. It can be seen as the conclusion of a century of legislative work. In the following century – when a native monarchy was lacking – it gained importance as an expression of the identity of the Swedish realm. In parallel with the Landlaw, a Town law was prepared, aimed primarily at regulating urban conditions in Stockholm.

An important issue not touched upon by the Landlaw concerned the degree to which land was free from taxation. In 1281 King Magnus Birgersson had exempted the land then possessed by the Church from all ordinary royal taxes. The intention was probably that the amount of exempted church land would be brought up to date by succeeding monarchs' renewals of ecclesiastical

¹⁴ The Landlaw is printed in Schlyter, *Samling af Sveriges gamla lagar*, 10; translation into modern Swedish with commentaries in Å. Holmbäck and E. Wessén, *Magnus Erikssons landslag* (Rättshistoriskt bibliotek, 6, Lund, 1962).

immunity. This was also done in 1305, with Birger Magnusson's coronation three years earlier as the new time limit. Henceforth, 'old' church property acquired until 1302 was distinguished from 'new' land that could be taxed according to the principle *res transit cum onere* (property is transferred with its obligations). This principle did, however, not affect church land acquired after 1302 from owners who were themselves exempt from taxation in return for military service; such land remained tax-free although the Church did not provide the service.

For land exempted in return for service on horseback no limit was fixed; one obligation simply took the place of the other. Exemption thus applied to all the property of the person in question as long as he provided the service that was due. In the long run, this was not tenable from the point of view of the Crown. The statutes of Magnus Eriksson and the later Landlaw laid down that a nobleman should present himself annually for an inspection of weapons to show that he was fully capable of military service, though this did not apply to aged noblemen, widows and minor sons who retained their tax exemption. In 1334 it was decreed that peasant land should remain liable to taxation when it was acquired by noblemen. The inquisition which was carried out throughout the entire kingdom in 1351 shows that this was put into effect.¹⁵

Originally, tax exemption was given to ecclesiastical institutions or to individual 'free-born men', but it generally ended up by being tied to the land itself. This was necessary in order to avoid an uncontrollable reduction of the basis of taxation. It appears that peasants sold their land in fact or fictitiously to landowners who were exempt from taxation, but continued to cultivate it on more favourable terms as tenants. A special problem was created by 'mixed property' (*bona commixta*). When a peasant cultivated land that was partly taxable and partly exempted, for example the land of a parish church, should he then pay tax at all? This was dealt with in the statute issued by Magnus Eriksson in Jönköping in 1352, which sought to prevent the 'landed' peasant from avoiding taxes by cultivating exempted land, and at the same time made it clear that such land should be taxed if the obligation of armed service was not fulfilled. The review of weapons was apparently carried out with some efficiency so that small nobles or their heirs could be reduced to the state of taxable farmers.

The conflict between King Birger Magnusson and his brothers must have produced significant strains. In the 'Charter of Liberties' issued at the royal

¹⁵ J. Rosén, *Kronoavsnödringar under äldre medeltid* (Skrifter utgivna av Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund, 46, Lund, 1949); G. Bjarne Larsson, *Stadslagstiftning i senmedeltidens Sverige* (Rättshistoriskt bibliotek, 51, Lund, 1994).

election in 1319 it was stated that the privileges of the Church and 'men' had in the past been violated and the 'common people' oppressed by unfair burdens; henceforth all extra burdens should be approved by those affected by them. The election statute issued at the accession of Magnus Eriksson and the later Landlaw prescribed that the king should content himself with ordinary taxes and *Uppsala öd*, the crown property (cf. Chapter 8(e)); further burdens should only be exacted when the kingdom was attacked, and then with the consent of those affected. This was an attempt to reintroduce an imagined older order far from the actual reality, and was therefore of little consequence.

In 1336, in an open letter, King Magnus justified his fiscal policies by stating that his regents had left him an empty treasury, even though they had exacted a series of extraordinary taxes. In order to pay the debts his servants had taken upon themselves he had been forced to pledge crown income from large parts of the realm. What had been added most recently was the enormous payment for Skåne, for which the great nobles of the realm had issued guarantees.¹⁶

What, then, was the ordinary income of the Crown and how was it used?¹⁷ It was collected by bailiffs within fiscal districts and in the first place consisted of those taxes in kind – agricultural produce, hunting and fishing – which had been fixed in the late thirteenth century, often replacing a service, and of the fines which were due fully or in part to the king. The bailiffs, whether of high or low estate, generally had to account for their revenue and expenditure. In the case of fiscal districts around strongholds the Crown's income principally went towards the maintenance of the fortification and its garrison. In 1340 an instruction to the captain of Åbohus, who at times administered all Finland except the district of Viborg, distinguished between what he should deliver to the king and what he should retain for his own administration. Accounts from the fiscal districts of Nyköping and Dalarna for the turbulent years of 1365–7, the only accounts preserved, show that the Crown's income was far from sufficient to cover the bailiff's expenses for building work, expeditions with his own knights, and the due sustenance of suites travelling through the region.

The Crown's net income from ordinary taxes and fines was consequently small, as was the yield of the crown land. The income from minting and customs duties cannot have been large in a kingdom where only small coins were struck and foreign trade was not extensive. Yet, one crown income of increasing importance was the tenth levied on the production of copper and iron.

16 See discussion by O. Brandenburg-Jensen, B. Fritz and E. Lönnroth in *Historisk tidskrift*, 101 (Stockholm, 1981).

17 See note 7.

Even under peaceful conditions the ordinary income of the monarchy was hardly enough to sustain its activity. A natural solution was to demand extraordinary taxes and services, especially as there was no exemption from them. Such possibilities were, however, restricted, and extraordinary taxes tended to provoke violent reactions. The alternative, especially when cash was needed urgently, was to borrow.

To keep creditors away Magnus Eriksson borrowed from the tithe of the Church in 1333 and 1344, and in 1351 he borrowed money that had been collected on behalf of the papal treasury – his inability to repay the papacy earned him excommunication. Loans for which the income of the Crown was put up as security – and consequently the administration of entire tax districts and other sources of income – had apparently been necessary already during Magnus' minority. When foreign princes and magnates were drawn into Swedish politics from the 1350s the real or fictitious loans became too large ever to be redeemed. The pledges then became fiefs which could be taken over by heirs; thus a new feudal element was introduced. This practice culminated in the Mecklenburg era (1364–89) when large parts of the realm were mortgaged in the same way as had happened in Denmark in the 1320s and 1330s. As in Denmark the result was the collapse of the royal power that had been founded by Magnus Eriksson's great-grandfather and grandfather.

The state of the realm at the end of the Folkung era

The division of the kingdom between the royal brothers in the early fourteenth century threatened to destroy the integration that had been achieved by the Folkung monarchy in the preceding century. The nobility split in factions around the respective princes.

The death of the dukes and the flight of the king brought about a complete change. In the Charter of Liberties of 1319 nobles representing every legal district and headed by the lawman constituted the election assembly, together with the bishops. On behalf of the young king they rejected the abuses of the previous years: violations of the privileges of Church and 'men', illegally levied taxes, arbitrary imprisonment, the use of foreign (Roman) law, and the use of foreigners as counsellors and administrators. On behalf of the people (*communitas*) they promised loyalty to those now ruling. The same spirit imbues *Erikskrönikan*, ending with the events of 1319.

In the succeeding regency period we have seen that the previous royal council came to function as a more autonomous 'council of the realm', as happened at the same time in Norway and Denmark. The above-mentioned

election statute from the accession of Magnus Eriksson, later included in the Landlaw, reflects the council's conception of the state: the inviolable territory of the kingdom, the indivisible and elective kingship. The king-to-be shall swear to give the Church its right, to maintain justice, to violate no individual, to rule the kingdom with the help of native men, to preserve the assets of the Crown and the boundaries of the realm, to content himself with the crown property and 'annual just taxes' (except in certain specific cases, whereby every legal district with bishop, lawman, six nobles, and six peasants shall be a party to negotiations), to observe the privileges of Church and nobility, and finally to uphold Swedish law (as opposed to 'foreign law' and unjustly adopted law) and internal peace. All this was to be accomplished by the oath of the lawmen on the part of the common people and followed by the traditional tour of the realm and the coronation.

The Landlaw introduced a novelty by also regulating the king's council. It had to include the archbishop, those bishops and clerics desired by the king, and twelve representatives of the nobility. They were to swear an oath to give useful counsel impartially, to strengthen the king in upholding the law of the realm according to his oath, and to keep his secrets.¹⁸

'The constitution of the Landlaw', as it has been called, was in force and invoked until 1719. It was retrospective in form and spirit and coloured by lofty idealism, and there was a considerable discrepancy between its provisions and the government actually exercised by Magnus Eriksson and his son Erik. In keeping with what had happened in 1284 and 1304 Erik as a minor was designated and elected in his father's lifetime; attempts were made to restrict the privileges of the upper strata; extraordinary taxes were levied; foreign princes and magnates acquired fiefs and pledges. The constitution of the Landlaw was not fully observed at any time in later years. Even so it proved significant for the development of a Swedish national identity, for asserting the extension as well as the limitations of royal power, and for the role of the council as a body representative of the realm. The legal districts' right to approve new taxes and the stipulations for the king's election formed the ultimate legal ground of the meetings of estates, the later *Riksdag* or parliament.

From the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth centuries the Swedish kingdom underwent rapid change. Acting with the Church and the secular nobility the monarchy effected an integration in various fields. The territory of the

18 F. Lagerroth, *Den svenska landslagens författning i historisk och komparativ belysning* (Skrifter utgivna av Fahlbeckska stiftelsen, 32, Lund, 1947); T. H. Schück, 'Sweden's early parliamentary institutions from the thirteenth century to 1611', in M. Metcalf (ed.), *The Riksdag: A History of the Swedish Parliament* (Stockholm, 1987), pp. 5–60, 315–16.

kingdom was secured and considerably extended in the east. At the end of the Folkung era a common Swedish law was in the process of penetrating the whole kingdom from its centre, now the Mälars valley, focused on Stockholm and Uppsala, together with Östergötland. The former chieftains and magnates of the various regions had developed into an aristocracy of the realm in close relationship, positive or negative, with the monarchy, and was represented by the council of the realm, at times supplemented by larger assemblies of magnates. External and internal security was based on a system of royal strongholds and on the nobles' military service; behind this were the taxation system and the privileges of the noble classes.

At the same time, some weak points are obvious. The depositions of crowned monarchs in 1275, 1306, 1318, 1356, 1362 and 1364 reflect a political organisation that was still unstable. In spite of an increasing burden of taxation borne by the peasants, resources were not sufficient for the demands of a monarchy of contemporary European type. Trade and towns were still relatively undeveloped and dominated by foreigners, and a loyal element of civil and military servants was lacking. At the end of the period treated here the Swedish kingdom was annexed to a north German principality and was threatened by disintegration, from which it was saved by the Scandinavian union monarchy which took over from the Mecklenburgers.

12 (e) Growing inter-Scandinavian entanglement

KNUT HELLE

Internal consolidation in the high medieval Scandinavian kingdoms meant that more energy and resources could be directed to foreign affairs, which led to expansion in directions that were determined by the different geographical positions of the three kingdoms, and partly also by traditions from the Viking Age.¹ Norway and Sweden lay, as it were, with their backs to each other and expanded in opposite directions: Norway towards the islands of the western sea, Sweden towards Finland and the eastern Baltic. The Danish kingdom, situated across the maritime access to the Baltic and comprising the northernmost part of the west European continent, found the chief outlets for its foreign energies in north Germany and along the Slavonic south coast of the Baltic, but had ambitions in the eastern Baltic as well. Danish and Swedish expansion in the Baltic was closely connected with missionary endeavours, which the papacy was willing to treat as crusades. In the west the organisation of a separate Norwegian church province paved the way for Norwegian expansion.

Under the rule of the Valdemarian kings in the latter part of the twelfth and the first decades of the thirteenth century, a Danish dominion was established over Germany north of the Elbe, including the coastal areas south of the Baltic inhabited by Slavonic population groups, and further east Estonia was brought under Danish sovereignty. Denmark broke away from its inferior position in relation to the German kingdom and emerged as the strongest power in the Baltic, but the capture of King Valdemar II in 1223 and his defeat at Bornhøved in 1227 put an end to Danish expansion. North Estonia was kept under the

1 For surveys of the foreign policies of the three kingdoms in the high Middle Ages, see J. Rosén, *Tiden före 1718* (*Svensk historia*, 1, Stockholm, 1962); K. Helle, *Norge blir en stat 1130–1319* (K. Mykland et al. (eds.), *Handbok i Norges historie*, 3, Bergen, 1974; reprinted 1991); A. E. Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', in A. E. Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 1 (København, 1977), pp. 211–399; K. Hørby, *Velstands krise og tusind baghold* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, 5, København, 1989); N. Bjørge, '800–1536: Makt og avmakt', in N. Bjørge et al., *Selvstendighet og union: Fra middelalderen til 1905* (*Norsk utenrikspolitikkens historie*, 1, Oslo, 1995), pp. 17–132.

Danish crown but the north German possessions had to be relinquished with the exception of the island of Rügen. In the period of political unrest following Valdemar's death the old territorial ambitions were not forgotten but had largely to be buried until they were revived by King Erik Menved in the two first decades of the fourteenth century.

In Norway the foreign policy of the consolidated monarchy of the Sverre family after the end of the Civil Wars had a marked westward orientation, resulting in Norwegian dominion over Greenland, Iceland, Føroyar, Shetland, Orkney, and temporarily the Hebrides and the Isle of Man. The Norwegian crown now also actively supported Norwegian colonisation along the coast of Troms and Finnmark in the northernmost part of the Scandinavian peninsula where it eventually came into conflict with the principality of Novgorod over the right to tax the Sami and trade with them. It was above all the expansive Karelians who drew their Novgorod sovereign into this rivalry.

Swedish interests, too, were making themselves increasingly felt in the north. This had partly to do with the territorial ambitions of the Folkung monarchy on the other side of the Baltic, bringing Sweden into conflict with Novgorod. The inclusion of Finland in the Swedish realm, which had started in the mid-twelfth century (Chapter 8(c)), was continued by Earl Birger's subjugation of the Tavasts and the erection of the stronghold of Tavastehus. Swedish rule in Finland was consolidated in the reign of King Magnus Birgersson who also drew Gotland with the town of Visby closer to Sweden. Then, in the 1290s, came the conquest of Karelia with the establishment of the strongholds of Viborg in 1293 and Landskrona in 1300; the latter opened the prospect of control over the navigation on the Neva to Novgorod, so important for the Hanseatic fur trade.

Parallel with these expansionist policies other foreign interests were, however, gaining ground in Norway and Sweden. From the mid-thirteenth century there was a growing inter-Scandinavian entanglement that eventually resulted in the Nordic unions of the later Middle Ages.² The new political trend was signalled by a series of meetings of Scandinavian rulers at the mouth of the Göta river on the border of the three kingdoms from the end of the 1240s. They were accompanied by representative retinues of magnates and other troops.

2 The growing inter-Scandinavian entanglement from the mid-thirteenth century was originally treated with a masterful grasp of the details by the Norwegian historian P. A. Munch, *Det norske Folks Historie*, 4:1–2 (Christiania, 1858–9). His work has been followed up by two Swedish historians: J. Rosén, *Striden mellan Birger Magnusson och hans bröder: Studier i nordisk politisk historia 1302–1319* (Lund, 1939), and H. Yrwing, *Kungamordet i Finderup: Nordiska förvecklingar under senare delen av Erik Klippings regering* (Vetenskaps-Societeten i Lund, Skrifter, 45, Lund, 1954).

The negotiations resulted in agreements and alliances which were sometimes confirmed by marriages between the royal families. These meetings should be seen in the light of the consolidation of the Norwegian and Swedish kingdoms which was in progress under King Håkon Håkonsson and Earl Birger Magnusson. Both were interested in exploiting the internal political turbulence which was now weakening the Danish kingdom. Another factor in these more active inter-Nordic relations was the economic upswing which was taking place along the present-day Swedish west coast from Bohuslän to Skåne.

From about 1250 more frequent use of the direct sailing route north of Jylland led to an increase in trade and shipping between the North Sea and the Baltic. The chain of proto-Hanseatic towns which had from the mid-twelfth century been established from Lübeck to the Gulf of Finland developed into bulk exporters of grain to the growing populations of western Europe, of lumber and other forestry products, and of salt from Lüneburg via Lübeck. Their merchants traded in furs and wax from Russia and Flemish cloth, and helped to draw Scandinavia into the commercial revolution of the high Middle Ages by exporting Swedish copper and iron, animal products from all three kingdoms, herring caught off Skåne and Bohuslän, stockfish and other fish products from northern and western Norway. Positioned between the North Sea and the Baltic, the strategically placed herring fairs of Skåne, dominated by Lübeck, developed into an international trading station of great fiscal importance to Danish monarchs. The growing importance of the north German ports for the Norwegian and Swedish economies is witnessed by the peace agreements made with Lübeck by King Håkon in 1250 and Earl Birger in 1252. Grain from Lübeck was now considered necessary for Norway, and Earl Birger acknowledged the significance of the Lübeck traders by granting them freedom from customs duties.

For the Norwegian government relations with Lübeck were obviously part of a grander scheme involving control over the coastal areas east of Kattegat and Öresund. In Norwegian Bohuslän, Marstrand and other islands were developed by the Crown as fishing stations and marketplaces, and duties were imposed on foreigners' export of herring from there. The Norwegian position on the Göta river was strengthened by building work on Öckerö at the river-mouth and the erection of the castle of Ragnhildarholm on the northern arm of the river opposite Konghelle. At the same time King Håkon and his counsellors turned their eyes further south. Their first goal was obviously territorial expansion at the cost of the Danish kingdom in Halland south of the Göta river, an area rich in timber and with increasing cattle farming and butter production along its rivers. Control over Skåne may also have been in their

thoughts, and, according to his saga, Håkon was even offered overlordship of Lübeck by Emperor Frederic II.

In Sweden Earl Birger acceded to power at a time when the kingdom started seriously to open up towards the west after a long and predominantly east-oriented history. The barrier of wilderness between Västergötland and the coastal areas to the west was now in the process of being broken through from the Swedish side by forest clearances for cultivation, and the importance of commercial contacts down the river from Lödöse was increasing. At some time in the decades before 1260 a Swedish corridor to the coast was apparently also opened along the south bank of the river, at the cost of Danish territory.

In 1249 an alliance was made at Lödöse between King Håkon and Earl Birger and confirmed by the betrothal of Birger's daughter to Håkon's son and co-ruler, Håkon the Young. Birger may have wanted to prevent Norwegian support to the aristocratic opposition against him in Sweden; in that case, Håkon kept his bargain by refusing to support Birger's enemies when his son Valdemar became the Swedish king in 1250. Håkon's chief aim was probably to obtain Swedish backing for an aggressive policy against Denmark, for which he later also sought support by approaching the Danish anti-royal opposition through Archbishop Jacob Erlandsen in Lund. In 1252 Håkon and Birger agreed upon a Swedish–Norwegian action against Halland and Skåne in the following year, but the plan came to nothing because Birger adopted a mediating role in the Danish–Norwegian conflict. Norwegian control on both sides of the mouth of the Göta river was clearly not in his interest. A more natural policy was to preserve a Danish–Norwegian power balance east of Kattegat and exploit the internal Danish conflicts for purely Swedish ends.

This was the course taken by Birger. Håkon attacked Halland on his own with a large fleet and army in 1256, but Birger came to terms with King Christopher of Denmark in 1257 and thus put pressure on Håkon to compromise with Christopher. After Christopher's death in 1259 Birger started meddling more actively in internal Danish affairs. In 1260 he arranged the marriage of his son King Valdemar to Sofia, daughter of the deceased King Erik Plovpenning, and in 1261 he himself married Mechtilde, widow of Erik's brother and successor, Abel, sister of the counts of Holstein and mother of Erik Abelsen who claimed Schleswig as a hereditary fief, thus establishing connections with both branches of the Danish royal family that were competing with that represented by Christopher. The option now left to King Håkon in his Danish policy was to effect, against the will of the Danish government, the planned marriage between his son and co-ruler Magnus and Ingeborg, sister of Sofia, by virtually abducting her from a nunnery in Jylland in 1261.

Håkon's death in 1263 put a temporary end to Norwegian expansion at the cost of Denmark. His son and successor, Magnus the Law-mender, pursued a consistent policy of peace and stability in his relations with foreign powers. He ceded the Hebrides and the Isle of Man to Scotland in 1266. Although the controversial question of the Danish inheritance of his queen was not solved in his lifetime he never let it come to an open break with the Danish government. The peaceful relations with Sweden from his father's days continued, leading to the first known survey of the border between the two kingdoms.

Magnus' Swedish brother-in-law, King Valdemar, intervened more actively in Danish affairs through his queen and her two unmarried sisters, which contributed to his downfall. A natural countermove for King Erik Klipping in Denmark was to support the rising which put Magnus Birgersson on the Swedish throne in 1275 (Chapter 12(d)). It was in vain that the Norwegian King Magnus, as arbitrator, took Valdemar's side and that Valdemar temporarily obtained Danish support; Magnus Birgersson became the most powerful ruler of high medieval Sweden. After some time, lasting good relations were established between the ruling houses of Denmark and Sweden and in the 1280s were confirmed by the engagement of the successor to the throne in each kingdom, Birger Magnusson and Erik Menved, to a sister of the other; the marriages were contracted in the 1290s. The Danish–Swedish alliance deprived the Norwegian monarchy of Swedish support for its claim to the inheritance of the Plovpenning daughters; if it wanted to pursue the claim and renew its west coast ambitions, association with Danish opposition forces was the only expedient left.

Magnus Law-mender's death put his twelve-year-old son Eirik on the Norwegian throne under the regency of a council of barons and royal officials in which Magnus' Danish widow, as queen dowager, played an active role. Free of the restraining influence of King Magnus they set a more daring political course which was continued after the weak Eirik came of age. Håkon Håkonsson's policy of confrontation with Denmark was resumed and restrictions imposed in Bergen on merchants from the north German ports who had been given their first privileges by King Magnus. Before it embarked on this risky course of action the council took care to secure its connections with England and Scotland, one result of which was the marriage between King Eirik and Margaret, daughter of the Scottish king Alexander III, in 1281.³ In the

3 For high medieval Norwegian relations with England and Scotland, which can only be hinted at here, see K. Helle, 'Anglo-Norwegian relations in the reign of Håkon Håkonsson (1217–63)', *Medieval Scandinavia*, 1 (Odense, 1968), pp. 101–14; K. Helle, 'Norwegian foreign policy and the maid of Norway', *Scottish Historical Review*, 69 (1990), pp. 142–56.

open conflict which ensued in 1284–5 Lübeck and the other grain-exporting Wendish towns used blockades as a weapon against Norway. The Norwegian government had to accept the arbitration of King Magnus Birgersson in Kalmar in 1285; it was forced to withdraw the restrictions on German merchants and pay a heavy indemnity. The settlement with the German ports did, however, mean that they no longer had a common case with the Danish king Erik Klipping, with whom they had allied against Norway, so that the Norwegian government had a free hand to continue intervening in Danish affairs. This policy was combined with a continued accommodating attitude towards the German ports whose traders in 1294 obtained extensive privileges in Norway.

The Norwegian council had already in the early 1280s started to activate the claim to the queen dowager's Danish inheritance in cooperation with the growing aristocratic opposition against Erik Klipping; the leading Danish spokesman for the Norwegian interests was Count Jacob of North Halland. What prospects there were for a peaceful solution were effectively ended by the murder of Erik Klipping in Finderup in 1286. This put into power an absolutist faction centred on the young King Erik Menved which exploited the murder in its propaganda and finally had the leading members of the Danish aristocratic opposition sentenced to outlawry for their alleged complicity in the murder (see Chapter 8(b)).

The outlaws declared themselves innocent and at once made efforts to regain their political position, fiefs and landed property in Denmark. They found their main support in Norway where the government welcomed them as instruments of its Danish policy; in 1287 they were taken under the protection of King Eirik and his brother Duke Håkon as their men. Norwegian political relations with Sweden had been cool after King Magnus Birgersson's arbitration in favour of the German ports in 1285, and in the late 1280s west Swedish magnates in opposition to Magnus sought support in Norway, thus establishing a pattern which was to underlie political events in the two following decades: the ruling monarchs in Denmark and Sweden tended to continue cooperating whereas the Norwegian government associated itself with the forces of opposition in those kingdoms.

The Norwegian naval pressure against Denmark, which had begun in the days of Håkon Håkonsson, was now resumed in alliance with the Danish outlaws. In 1289, 1290, 1293 and 1295 the naval levy was summoned for large-scale expeditions to Danish waters. The Norwegian government sought to coordinate all Danish forces of opposition to King Erik Menved with its own policy, approaching the new archbishop in Lund, Jens Grand, who supported the Norwegian claims and those of the outlaws and sympathised openly with

the Norwegian intervention. The Norwegian coalition was also joined by the dukes of Schleswig, and was later strengthened by the marriage between Duke Håkon of Norway and Eufemia, grand-daughter of Prince Vitslav of Rügen.

Behind the Norwegian policy was now not only the claim to King Eirik's maternal inheritance but also the west coast aspirations from the days of Håkon Håkonsson. The first step was to transfer the castle of Ragnhildarholm to the outlaws, which gave count Jacob a point of departure for regaining North Halland where he built the castles of Hunehals and Varberg. The other leading outlaw, Marshal Stig, erected a castle on the small island of Hjelm off the east coast of Jylland. These strongholds were used to control the surrounding territories, to carry out raids of plunder against Denmark, and to control the shipping through the Danish sounds and belts. Hjelm and Hunehals were regarded as Norwegian crown possessions and became harbour stations for the vessels of the Wendish ports. The outlaws' control of the Halland castles and Ragnhildarholm at the intersection of the three Scandinavian kingdoms was the origin of the inter-Nordic enclave that was to be so important in the Scandinavian politics of the following century. The Norwegian pressure against Denmark ended temporarily with an armistice in Hindsgavl in 1295 which gave King Eirik and Duke Håkon right of disposal of their maternal Danish inheritance and the outlaws repossession of their landed property. The agreement was not conscientiously kept by any of the parties but was nevertheless renewed in 1298 and 1300.

After 1300 inter-Nordic relations were, to a much higher degree than before, determined by internal political conditions in Sweden. After the loss of Landskrona to a Russian force in 1301 the Swedish government, headed by Marshal Torgils Knutsson, gave up its active eastern policy and chose to engage in the Danish–Norwegian controversy, presumably with an eye to gaining influence in the increasingly important coastal areas to the west. The procedure of giving princely fiefs to younger royal sons, which had led to internal political unrest in Denmark after the death of Valdemar II, was now adopted in Sweden, eventually with the same result: conflict between King Birger Magnusson and his ducal brothers Erik and Valdemar (Chapter 12(d)). But the conflict did not break out until an agreement had been concluded between King Birger and King Håkon V of Norway in 1302, probably initiated from the Norwegian side and confirmed by the betrothal of King Håkon's one-year-old daughter Ingebjørg to Duke Erik. The Norwegian order of succession had been changed in favour of Ingebjørg and her potential male issue. Birger took the Danish outlaws under his protection and in the next year complied with the Norwegian wish for a common course of military action against Denmark.

The complete change in Swedish relations with Denmark was probably connected with the fact that Erik Menved, helped by the disintegration of the German kingdom, had now renewed the demand for Danish sovereignty over Germany north of the Elbe and demonstrated that he had ambitions in the eastern Baltic, too.⁴ His foreign policy posed a threat to the Wendish ports headed by Lübeck and made them prone to join anti-Danish coalitions, as first shown by the presence of envoys from Lübeck at the Swedish–Norwegian meeting in 1302. Their exposed situation in relation to Erik Menved also made it possible for King Håkon in Norway to pursue a national commercial policy which put restrictions on German traders.

The Swedish–Norwegian rapprochement of 1302–3 was, however, only a passing stage. When the Swedish dukes broke with their royal brother in 1304 the breach was skilfully exploited by Erik Menved to renew his alliance with King Birger, which was to last until 1319. The natural ally of the Swedish dukes was consequently King Håkon, who had not given up the Norwegian ambitions south of the Göta river and obviously hoped to use his future son-in-law to strengthen his position there. In 1304 he granted Elvesysle (south Bohuslän) with the castle of Ragnhildarholm to Duke Erik as a fief, and when Danish military pressure made Count Jacob transfer North Halland with the castles of Hunehals and Varberg to Håkon in 1305, it was passed on to Erik. Erik, who now emerged as the most dynamic player in Scandinavian politics, at once showed that he had no interest in becoming an instrument for Norwegian interests. The dukes regained their old position in Sweden and Erik also managed to have Erik Menved acknowledge his possession of North Halland. From their new position of strength the dukes were behind the fall of Marshal Torgils and then, in 1306, took King Birger captive.

As the effective ruler of Sweden, with fiefs in the other two kingdoms, Duke Erik from 1306 worked to build an extensive coalition against Erik Menved, including King Håkon, Erik Menved's brother Duke Christopher of South Halland, other Danish magnates, and apparently also Lübeck and a rebellious faction in Holstein. But the coalition split when Erik Menved obtained overlordship of Lübeck in 1307 and was left free to use his military resources against the dukes who in 1308 had to give up their anti-Danish policy and release their brother.

King Håkon realised that Duke Erik could not be used to promote Norwegian interests east of Kattegat, and had joined Erik Menved in his efforts

⁴ Erik Menved's north German policy and his foreign policy in general has been treated in great detail by I. M. Andersson, *Erik Menved och Venden: Studier i dansk utrikespolitik 1300–1319* (Lund, 1954).

to have King Birger reinstated in Sweden. This led to an open conflict with the dukes, in which Håkon was largely left alone and had little success. The Norwegian naval levy was called out but was unable to regain Ragnhildarholm. The dukes retaliated with cavalry attacks on eastern Norway in 1308 and 1309; they also managed to take possession of the stronghold of Bohus which Håkon had started to build to control both branches of the Göta river. Håkon was largely left out of the peace finally concluded between the dukes and kings Erik Menved and Birger in Helsingborg in 1310 whereby Sweden was divided between Birger and his brothers.

One price paid by Duke Erik for the peace of Helsingborg was to give up, temporarily, his Norwegian marriage. But he consolidated his position as the ruler of an inter-Scandinavian dominion comprising Norwegian *Elvesysle*, Danish North Halland and the west Swedish provinces. In this situation King Håkon saw no prospect of regaining Norwegian influence east of Kattegat other than by approaching the Swedish dukes anew. In 1312 he let them celebrate a double wedding in Oslo, Erik with his own daughter and heir to the throne, Valdemar with the daughter of his deceased brother King Eirik. Duke Erik was now in the process of building up a new coalition against Erik Menved, including the north German ports headed by Lübeck. This time, however, he chose to exploit his favourable position to obtain an agreement with Erik Menved and King Birger by which he not only retained his inter-Scandinavian realm but also had his Norwegian marriage accepted by the other party.

King Håkon maintained his alliance with his son-in-law but now tended to withdraw from the inter-Nordic political game. He had been outmanoeuvred by more able players and it must have dawned on him and his counsellors that Norway did not possess the economic and military resources necessary to go on pursuing the active and aggressive Nordic policy he had himself adopted in the early years of his reign. Norwegian naval power, which in the 1290s had been superior in Danish waters, was no longer able to dictate solutions: now warfare was on land, centred on strongholds, and fought by more professional forces than the naval levy. Hence there developed an incipient Norwegian isolationism in Scandinavian politics, dictated by fear of being overrun and dominated by stronger adversaries. The prospects of the Swedish dukes, however, looked more promising than ever after their Norwegian consorts had given birth to sons in 1316, which meant that Magnus Eriksson was now next in line for the Norwegian throne.

The situation changed dramatically when the Swedish dukes were imprisoned by King Birger in 1317, probably in connivance with Erik Menved, and perished in prison the next year. But the following rising against Birger in

Sweden led to the election of Magnus Eriksson as king of Sweden in 1319, and in the same year he was acclaimed hereditary king of Norway after his newly deceased grandfather. Thus the first of the medieval Scandinavian unions was established. It was clearly an outcome of the inter-Nordic entanglement which had started in the mid-thirteenth century, not least on the initiative of the consolidated Norwegian monarchy under Håkon Håkonsson. The process had now gone too far to be stopped by the new-found cautiousness of Håkon V in his last years; it was his own dynastic arrangement from 1302, an inherent part of his early and ambitious power policy, which made his kingdom the weaker part of the unions to come.

The Scandinavian political situation in 1318–19 was confused not only by the deaths of the Swedish dukes and King Håkon in Norway and the expulsion of King Birger from Sweden. Towards the end of 1319 Erik Menved, too, passed away. After the peace of Hälsingborg in 1310 he had managed to keep his strong position in north Germany. There was, however, no one to succeed him but his brother Christopher, who, since his revolt in 1307, had continued to oppose Erik from his exile in Pomerania. As the new Danish king, Christopher was from the start hampered by financial problems created by his brother's expansionism and bound by the heavy obligations pressed on him by magnates who supported him only because there was no alternative. At the same time the common king of Norway and Sweden was a small boy surrounded by people with conflicting political aims. Politically troubled years thus lay ahead.

Church and society

ELJAS ORRMAN

During the eleventh century Christianity was accepted as the public religion in most of Scandinavia (see Chapter 7). By the end of that century the Christian faith had superseded pagan beliefs in Denmark, Norway and the Norse island communities of the Atlantic, but this happened more slowly in eastern Scandinavia.¹

In Sweden, pagan attitudes persisted even in regions where many people had been converted. The situation there was described in about 1130 by the Anglo-Danish monk Ailnoth:

The Svear and Götar, however, seem to honour the Christian faith only when things go according to their wishes and luck is on their side; but if storm winds are against them, if the soil turns barren during drought or is flooded by heavy rainfall, if an enemy threatens to attack with harrying and burning, then they persecute the Christian faith that they claim to honour, and with threats and injustice against the faithful they seek to chase them out of the land.²

In some areas pagan burial customs continued to be practised long after churches were built. For example, on the island of Öland off the coast of south-east Sweden a community that had a stone church by the early twelfth century continued to cremate some of their dead even in the second half of that century. In the sparsely populated northern provinces of Hälsingland, Medelpad and Ångermanland on the west coast of the Gulf of Bothnia it was not

¹ For high medieval church history in general, see H. Koch, *Den äldre middelalder indtil 1241* (H. Koch and B. Kornerup (eds.), *Den danske kirkes historie*, 1, København, 1950); N. K. Andersen, *Senmiddelalderen 1241–1448* (ibid., 2, København, 1962); B. Nilsson, *Missionstid och tidig medeltid* (L. Tegnér (ed.), *Sveriges kyrkohistoria*, 1, Stockholm, 1998); Y. Brilioth, *Den senare medeltiden* (H. Holmquist and H. Pleijel (eds.), *Svenska kyrkans historia*, 2, Uppsala, 1941); O. Kolsrud, *Noregs Kyrkesaga*, 1, Millomalderen (Oslo, 1958); C. F. Wisløff, *Norsk kirkehistorie*, 1 (Oslo, 1966); K. Pirinen, *Keskiaika ja uskonpuhdistuksen aika* (Suomen kirkon historia, 1, Porvoo–Helsinki–Juva, 1991); Pirinen, *Medeltiden och reformationstiden* (Finlands kyrkohistoria, 1, Skellefteå, 2000).

² M. Cl. Gertz (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum* (København, 1908–12), p. 83.

until the first half of the thirteenth century that the settled agrarian population completely abandoned paganism for Christianity.³

The semi-nomadic Sami who lived in the northern and north-eastern part of Scandinavia were not integrated in the sedentary population's structures of society and remained largely unaffected by its conversion to Christianity, although there is evidence that some Sami in northern Ångermanland had adopted the custom of inhumation burial by the eleventh century, soon after their Scandinavian neighbours in the coastal region did so.⁴

Attempts to convert the Sami were begun by the Norwegian king Håkon Håkonsson (1217–63). The first recorded attempt to evangelise the Sami in the northern part of the Swedish sphere of influence was in 1346 when Hemming, archbishop of Uppsala, baptised a number of them in Torneå during his visitation of Norrbotten. In the late 1380s Queen Margrethe was persuaded by a visionary Sami woman, who was her namesake, to take an interest in the conversion of the Sami. Attempts to evangelise them continued through the rest of the Middle Ages and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but with little success.⁵

The conversion of Finland

The conversion of the Finns, a process that was not completed until the high Middle Ages, was closely related to their incorporation in the Swedish kingdom. But, the victory of Christianity in Finland was different in one fundamental respect from that in other parts of Scandinavia. In the Scandinavian kingdoms it was brought about by the conversion of the native rulers and in Iceland by the decision of the *Althing*, but in Finland it was effected by force exerted by foreign conquerors.

Some Finns were, however, already under Christian influence as early as the beginning of the eleventh century. It was then that some began to practise inhumation instead of cremation, although they continued to bury the dead with grave goods. There was also a gradual tendency for graves to be oriented

3 S. Brink, *Sockenbildning och sockennamn: Studier i äldre territoriell indelning i Norden* (*Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi*, 57, Uppsala, 1990), pp. 25–6; S. Brink, 'När norrlänningen bytte religion', in L. Rumar (ed.), *Helgonet i Nidaros: Olavskult och kristnande i Norden* (*Skrifter utgivna av Riksarkivet*, 3, Stockholm, 1997), p. 243; A. S. Gräslund, 'Religionsskiftet i Norden', in G. Dahlbäck, *Kyrka – samhälle – stat: Från kristnande till etablerad kyrka* (*Historiallinen Arkisto*, 110:3, Helsingfors, 1997), pp. 35–6.

4 I. Zachrisson et al., *Möten i gränsland: Samer och germaner i Mellanskandinavien* (Stockholm, 1997), pp. 224–8.

5 J. Gallén, 'Missionsverksamhet', *KLNM*, 11 (1966), cols. 646–50.

east–west. By the mid-twelfth century the Christian custom of inhumation without grave goods was the dominant form of burial in the south-west region known as Finland Proper, and by the end of the century this was also true of the neighbouring regions of Satakunta and Tavastland, but the Karelians further east continued to use pagan forms of burial throughout the thirteenth century.⁶

Another indication of Christian influence is the occurrence of cross pendants in eleventh-century graves. In Finland these were only found in men's graves in contrast to Birka in Sweden where numerous such pendants have been found but only in the graves of women. The cross pendants in Finnish graves are thought to have belonged to people who were prime-signed, i.e. who had undergone the Christian ritual for catechumens preceding baptism, but had not been baptised.⁷

A new phase in the expansion of Christianity into the Baltic region began in the mid-twelfth century when military campaigns from the Christian kingdoms of Germany, Denmark and Poland against the pagan tribes living south and east of that sea began to be dignified as crusades. A crusade required papal authority and when the Saxons in 1147 refused to take part in what is conventionally known as the Second Crusade against the Holy Land, Bernard of Clairvaux persuaded Pope Eugenius II to issue a bull authorising the Christians of northern Europe to make war on their own heathens instead of marching on Jerusalem. The campaign waged later that year by Saxons and Danes against the Wends achieved little, but by 1169 later campaigns (which were not crusades) succeeded in subjugating and enforcing the conversion of the Wends.

The way was then open for expansion to the east, and in 1171 or 1172 Pope Alexander III issued a bull equating war against the Estonians and Finns with the crusade to the Holy Land. The Danes then concentrated their efforts against the Estonians, most of whom had been brought under Danish rule by 1219. The Swedes also hoped to gain a foothold in Estonia, but their main efforts were directed against the area north of the Gulf of Finland.

By the middle of the twelfth century Finland Proper was deeply influenced by Christianity but it lacked ecclesiastical organisation. There were indeed no

6 E. Kivikoski, *Suomen esihistoria* (*Suomen historia*, 1, Porvoo–Helsinki, 1961), pp. 229–34, 262; T. Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden', in M. Norrback (ed.), *Finlands historia*, 1 (Ekenäs, 1992), pp. 249–53; P. Purhonen, *Kristinuskon saapumisesta Suomeen. Uskontoarkeologinen tutkimus* (*Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen Aikakauskirja*, 106, Helsinki, 1998), pp. 149–53, 177–8.

7 J. P. Taavitsainen, 'Questions about the organizing process of the early church in Finland', in C. Krötzel and J. Masonen (eds.), *Quotidianum fennicum. Daily Life in Finland (Medium aevum quotidianum*, 19, Krems, 1989), pp. 83–4.

centres of secular power there to match those of the Scandinavian kingdoms. According to hagiography composed by the second half of the thirteenth century, the Swedish king St Erik, accompanied by Bishop Henrik, Finland's national saint, led a crusade to Finland in the mid-twelfth century. Several scholars have doubted whether there is any substance in that tradition.

There is, however, no doubt that ecclesiastical organisation began to be established in south-west Finland in the second half of the twelfth century. At this time, and in the early thirteenth century, the process of Christianisation also suffered some setbacks. Pope Alexander III's bull of 1171–2 describes the situation in south-west Finland, in stereotyped style:

When the Finns are threatened by enemies, they always promise to be faithful Christians and eagerly ask for preachers and interpreters of the Christian law, but when their enemies withdraw they renounce their faith, show contempt for preachers, and persecute them without mercy.⁸

The insecure position of Christianity in south-west Finland is also shown by the occasional reversion to pagan forms of burials in some places. In the thirteenth century the Swedes twice invaded Finland with force in what are conventionally known as the second and third crusades. The second, in 1238 or 1239, was against the inland province of Tavastland after a pagan reaction there, and the third, in 1293, was to Viborg in Karelia, which meant that the Swedish kingdom advanced into Novgorod's sphere of interest.

Between the middle of the twelfth and the end of the thirteenth centuries the authority of the Swedish crown in Finland and the status of the Christian church there were both consolidated. The Finnish historian Jalmari Jaakkola, followed by several other scholars, has argued that the success of Christianity in Finland was due not so much to Swedish secular power as to the independent activity of the Church. These scholars have suggested that Finland was in fact not conquered by Swedish force but that it was the ecclesiastical links with Sweden that led to the incorporation of Finland into the Swedish kingdom. They have even claimed, if less convincingly, that the Finnish provinces were not integrated in the Swedish kingdom until the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries.⁹ In general it can be said that

8 R. Hausen (ed.), *Finlands medeltidsurkunder*, 1 (Helsingfors, 1910), no. 24.

9 J. Jaakkola, *Suomen varhaiskeskiaika* (*Suomen historia*, 3, Porvoo–Helsinki, 1938), pp. 139–43, 147–50, 232–7, 247–57, 367–77; T. Lindkvist, 'När blev Finland svenskt? Om svenska behov av korståg mot Finland', *Finsk Tidskrift*, 1992:10, pp. 568–71; T. Lindkvist, 'Bishops, kings and aristocrats in the making of a European society of Sweden', in N. Blomkvist (ed.), *Culture, Clash or Compromise? The Europeanization of the Baltic Sea Area 1100–1400 AD. Visby symposiet för historiska vetenskaper 1996* (*Acta Visbyensia*, 11, Västervik, 1998), p. 298.

the conversion of the Finns and their inclusion into the Swedish kingdom happened without the 'national' opposition that characterised similar developments in other parts of the Baltic region.

From the end of the Viking Age and throughout the high Middle Ages western Catholic and eastern Orthodox missions met in Finnish territory. The evidence from written sources and archaeological material for the eastern missions from Novgorod is slight and contradictory. However, the fact that some of the most central terms of Christianity in Finnish were early loans from the east shows that the Finns were being influenced by Orthodox Christianity at a remarkably early date. These include the word 'cross' (Finnish *risti*, Russian *krest*) and 'bible' (Finnish *raamattu*, early Russian *gramota*, Greek *grammata*). For linguistic reasons these loans are thought to have already occurred by the year 1000, when there is no other clear evidence for missionary activity in Finland.¹⁰

The Karelians remained pagan longer than other Finnish tribes and it was not until the thirteenth century that the missionary activity and expansionist aims of the Novgorod principality were clearly evident among them, though they had traditionally had cultural and commercial contacts with the east and south-east and had, since the second half of the twelfth century, appeared in the sources as allies of Novgorod. A concrete demonstration of Novgorod's missionary interest was the mass baptism of the Karelians ordered by Prince Jaroslav in 1228. The treaty of Nöteborg (Chapter 12(d)) gave the Swedish kingdom a significant area occupied by Karelians among whom the Orthodox Christianity had by then begun to gain a foothold. After the treaty eastern Christianity had to give way to the western Christianity in that area.

The new boundary between the Swedish kingdom and Novgorod was for centuries the northern limit of the boundary between western and eastern Christianity. Despite some Orthodox missionary activity among Karelians east of the boundary, paganism continued to flourish around Lake Ladoga until the end of the fourteenth century. In 1380–90 two Orthodox monasteries were founded in the area, one of them being the renowned Valamo Abbey on the islands in Lake Ladoga on which pagan rites had earlier been celebrated.¹¹ It was only then that evangelism among Novgorod's Karelians began in earnest. In the mid-sixteenth century the Russian church began missionary activity among the Sami living in the Russian sphere of interest in the north by founding a monastery at Pechenga (Petsamo) on the coast of the Barents Sea.

¹⁰ Pirinen, *Keskiaika ja uskonpuhdistuksen aika*, p. 32.

¹¹ J. Lind, 'Fortællingen om Valamoklosteret: En nyfunden kilde til klosterets ældste historie', *Historisk Tidsskrift för Finland*, 77 (1992), pp. 28–30.

The consolidation of Scandinavian ecclesiastical organisation

In Scandinavia as elsewhere in the western Church bishops were the key figures; only they could perform all liturgical functions. Those that were discharged by other priests, for example baptisms, were considered to have been delegated. Rituals essential to the maintenance of the Church that could not be delegated included the ordination of priests, deacons and lower orders of clergy, the consecration of churches, confirmation (by which people entered full membership of the Church after baptism), and the blessing of the oil used in baptism and other rituals.

In Scandinavia it was not always possible to place the first permanent episcopal sees in towns, according to normal ecclesiastical practice. In such cases sees might serve as nuclei for the later development of towns, although in the western periphery (Orkney, Føroyar, Iceland and Greenland) medieval sees never became towns. The creation of dioceses within the framework of the archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen began in the tenth century. This was not exclusively a concern of the Church for secular rulers were actively involved in the formation of the dioceses. Almost all the dioceses in the Scandinavian kingdoms had been established by the middle of the twelfth century; only three were created after that.

The creation of diocesan organisation began in Denmark where the eight medieval bishoprics were all founded by about 1060. Bishops of Ribe, Schleswig and Århus were mentioned in 948, but the status of the churches in those towns for the rest of the century is uncertain. The diocese of Odense was founded by 988, that of Roskilde by about 1020, and those of Lund, Viborg and Vestervig (later moved to Børglum in Vendsyssel) in the reign of Sven Estridsen (1047–76) who is generally thought to have been actively involved in their creation, although that has been questioned.¹² The diocese of Reval (Tallinn) in Estonia was founded in 1219.

In Norway the creation of regular, territorial dioceses happened several decades after the conversion. Before that the missionary church was led by so-called *hirð* bishops, members of the retinue of the first Christian kings. The dioceses of Nidaros and Bergen were founded in the reign of Olaf Kyrre (1067–93) and that of Oslo was also created then or a little later. The bishopric of Stavanger was carved out of that of Bergen by about 1125 at the latest, and the bishopric of Hamar out of that of Oslo in 1152–3; both these places later

¹² C. Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus: Regnum og sacerdotium i Danmark 1050–1170* (Vojens, 1982), pp. 88–9.

developed into towns. Five other bishoprics were created in the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the Norse island communities of the Atlantic. As there were no towns in these islands, the bishops' sees were established close to the residences of chieftains or other central places. There were two sees in Iceland: Skálholt in the south from 1065, and Hólar in the north from 1106. A diocese comprising Orkney and Shetland was established in about 1050 with the bishop's see in Orkney. Føroyar also became a bishopric in the eleventh century and one was established in Greenland in 1112 with the see in Garðar.

In Sweden there were seven medieval dioceses. The oldest, Skara in the south, was created before 1050. A bishopric was also established during the eleventh century in Uppland, which was still partly pagan, with its see at Sigtuna. It was moved in about 1140 to what had been a pagan cult centre at Old Uppsala. There was a bishopric in Linköping before the end of the eleventh century, and soon afterwards the sees of Strängnäs and Västerås were established. The diocese of Växjö was founded in about 1170, and in about 1220 a bishopric was created in Finland, but the see was not established at Åbo (Turku) until 1300. In all these places the sees were instrumental in bringing about what there was of medieval urban development.

By the time bishoprics were established in Scandinavia both regular and secular cathedral chapters had developed within the western Church. The regular chapters were now commonly Augustinian or Premonstratensian if they were not in fact monasteries, while the members of the secular chapters lived separately, not communally. Thanks to the Gregorian reform movement to free the Church of secular influence, the political and administrative importance of chapters, in addition to their responsibility for the cathedral services, was greatly increased from the second half of the eleventh century and their right to elect bishops was confirmed by the second Lateran Council in 1139.

The first Scandinavian cathedral chapters were established at the end of the eleventh century and by 1300 most cathedrals had chapters. The earliest in Denmark were regular and in one case monastic: the Benedictine abbey in Odense founded by English monks from Evesham acted as the chapter of the cathedral. But by the thirteenth century most Danish chapters had become secular.

In Norway from the early twelfth century the Benedictine abbeys of Nidaros and Bergen may have served as institutions in support of the towns' episcopal sees, but there is no evidence for regular cathedral chapters. When proper chapters began to be instituted by the papal legate Nicolaus Brekespear, later Pope Hadrian IV, in 1152–3 they were all secular, though supported by Augustinian abbeys in Nidaros, Bergen and Stavanger.

In Sweden chapters were established later than in Denmark and Norway. The earliest, a Benedictine abbey with English monks, existed in Old Uppsala in the late twelfth century but only lasted for a few decades.¹³ It was Cardinal Wilhelm of Sabina, as papal legate to Sweden in 1248, supported by the regent Earl Birger, who was responsible for the creation of cathedral chapters that lasted.

There is no evidence from the high Middle Ages for cathedral chapters in Iceland, Greenland, Orkney or Føroyar but there is weak evidence of one in Hólar in the late Middle Ages.

The emancipation of the Scandinavian churches from Hamburg-Bremen

From the 830s it was the pope who gave the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen responsibility for missions to Scandinavia and authority over churches founded there. In 1053 Pope Leo IX confirmed this and listed the peoples over whom Archbishop Adalag and his successors had ecclesiastical authority: the Svear, the Danes, Norwegians, Icelanders, Sami, Greenlanders and all northern peoples. The archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen were as a rule among the most influential prince-bishops in the German empire and supported the policies of the imperial church that in the 1070s began to oppose the Gregorian papacy. At the same time they supported the political ambitions of the German empire in the north. Their superior authority had to be taken into account in the developing Scandinavian kingdoms in which churches were in many ways dependent on royal power, notably because the kings had a key role in the choice of bishops although it was the archbishops who consecrated them.

In the second half of the eleventh century the Gregorian reformers wished to establish direct links between the papacy and Scandinavia by placing its kingdoms and churches under the protection of the papacy. Papal interest in Scandinavia was due not only to the reformers' ambition to bring secular rulers and laws under the authority of the Church and its law, but also to the conflict with the German emperor and Church, in which the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen had a leading role. The papal policies towards Scandinavia were consequently determined largely by their relations with the German king and emperor.

The wish to free Scandinavia from its dependence on the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen and from German influence was already evident when

¹³ J. Gallén, 'De engelska munkarna i Uppsala – ett katedralkloster på 1100-talet', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 61 (1976), pp. 3–4, 20.

Knut the Great was king of Denmark (1018–35) and also later during the reigns of the Danish king Sven Estridsen (1047–76) and the Norwegian king Harald Hard-ruler (1046–66). King Knut attempted to put the Danish church under the archbishopric of Canterbury rather than Hamburg-Bremen, but was unsuccessful.¹⁴ King Harald was accused by Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen (1043–72) of having his bishops, some of them English, ordained in England and Gaul,¹⁵ and King Sven attempted to combat German influence by the creation of an independent Danish ecclesiastical province. Adalbert on his part had plans to create a northern patriarchate, but after the death of Leo IX in 1054 these came to nothing and Adalbert was instead given the status of the pope's legate and vicar in the north.

Direct, if intermittent, contacts between Danish kings and the papacy continued, and the possibility of a Danish or Scandinavian archbishopric was not forgotten. The breach between the papacy and the German empire and church that began under Gregory VII, in particular the refusal of Archbishop Liemar of Hamburg-Bremen to accept his deposition by Gregory in 1074, meant that the papacy treated the possibility of an independent Scandinavian church province more seriously. At the end of the century, the position of Emperor Henry IV weakened while Liemar continued to be excommunicate. The strengthened authority of the papacy in western Europe now made the creation of a Scandinavian church province, independent of Hamburg-Bremen, a realistic possibility. The visit of the Danish king Erik Ejegod (1095–1103) to Rome to request this gave Pope Paschal II (1099–1118) the opportunity in 1102–3 to create an independent province incorporating all the peoples listed by Leo IX in 1053, with its archiepiscopal see in Lund. In 1104 the first archbishop, Asser, received his pallium, the symbol of metropolitan authority, from the pope.¹⁶

The creation of this new province came about without the agreement of the Germans and was not accepted by the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen, who,

14 W. Seegrün, *Das Papsttum und Skandinavien bis zur Vollendung der nordischen Kirchenorganisation 1164* (Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins, 51, Neumünster, 1967), pp. 57–8; E. Hoffmann, 'Die Wechselbeziehungen der Politik Knuts des Großen gegenüber Olav Haraldsson von Norwegen und dem deutschen König/Kaiser Konrad II', in K. Haarstad et al. (eds.), *Innsikt og utsyn: Festskrift til Jørn Sandnes* (Skriftserie fra Historisk institutt, 12, Trondheim, 1996), p. 63.

15 K. Helle, 'The organisation of the twelfth-century Norwegian church', in B. Crawford (ed.), *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (Aberdeen, 1988), p. 47.

16 A. E. Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', in A. E. Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 1 (København, 1977), pp. 227–32, 259–60; O. Fenger, *Kirker rejses alle vegne* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, 4, København, 1989), pp. 111–12; Seegrün, *Das Papsttum*, pp. 66–70, 75–84, 117–22; H. Holze, 'Från rikskyrka till påvekyrka: Gregorius VII's "regimen universale" i hans brev till Skandinavien', *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift*, 1990, pp. 23–9, published in German in *Kerygma und Dogma*, 3/1990.

whenever the papacy was dominated by German kings or emperors, tried to abolish it and restore their authority over Scandinavia. This happened first in the early 1130s when Pope Innocent II needed the support of Emperor Lothar and again in about 1150 under Emperor Konrad II. The situation changed after Frederic Barbarossa was elected German king in 1152 at a time when it appeared that succession disputes in Denmark would lead the Danes to accept German overlordship. This made the papacy take steps to make the Norwegian and Swedish churches independent of Lund.

Immediately after the German election in 1152 Cardinal Nicolaus Brekespear was sent as papal legate to create separate Norwegian and Swedish church provinces. In Norway King Sigurd Crusader (1103–30) had already had thoughts of an independent Norwegian province and it is likely that by 1150 that was the ambition of the reform-minded clergy and also of the three co-ruling kings of Norway, particularly as a means of drawing the Norse island communities of the Western Ocean closer to Norway and counterbalancing the traditional Danish claim to overlordship of the south-eastern region of Viken (cf. Chapter 12(c)). In 1151, before the cardinal set out for Norway, the pope had consecrated an archbishop for Norway, but the latter died on his journey home.

In Norway the time was thus ripe for the creation of its own church province, which happened in 1152 or 1153 during the legate's visit. The new province comprised not only the five bishoprics of mainland Norway, but also the sees in Iceland, Greenland, Føroyar, Orkney as well as the diocese of Sodor and Man on the west coast of Scotland that had, since the eleventh century, been under the archbishop of York.¹⁷

The plans for a Swedish province could not be realised during Cardinal Nicolaus' visit because of internal disputes. Instead, Archbishop Eskil of Lund was appeased by being entrusted with the pallium meant for the new Swedish archbishop and later made papal legate for the Swedish church until its own province could be established. At the beginning of the 1160s the situation was favourable for this development after King Valdemar I of Denmark, under pressure from Emperor Frederic, recognised the anti-pope Victor IV. Thus, when in 1164 the Swedish king Karl Sverkersson sent a delegation to Pope Alexander (1159–81) asking for the creation of a Swedish province, the request was approved. As the exiled Archbishop Eskil accepted Alexander III he retained his

17 A. O. Johnsen, *Studier vedrørende kardinal Nicolaus Brekespears legasjon til Norden* (Oslo, 1946); Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', pp. 281–83, 294–5; Seegrün, *Das Papsttum*, pp. 133–7; 148; K. Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt 1130–1350* (K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norges historie*, 3, Oslo, 1995), pp. 142–4. Cf. also Chapter 12(c).

status as papal legate and *primas* over the Swedish province. Its subordination to Lund continued until the end of the Middle Ages.¹⁸

The creation of the Scandinavian archbishoprics gave the papacy the possibility to influence the Scandinavian kingdoms directly in fulfilment of Gregorian ideals, at the same time eliminating the ecclesiastical and political authority of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. The creation of national church provinces and the promotion of Archbishop Eskil as papal legate also proved to be an effective weapon against German imperial attempts to use the Church for political purposes. At the same time the formation of the Scandinavian archbishoprics created new, potentially autonomous powers that could use the spiritual authority of the papacy and the rules of canon law for their own purposes. The archbishops were in some respects the equals of kings and could challenge their leadership.

As a signal of its direct authority over the Scandinavian churches and kingdoms the papacy demanded the tax of Peter's pence, regarded by the curia as evidence that those who paid it were under papal protection. It was first paid in Denmark before 1100, and was introduced in Norway and Sweden during Nicolaus Brekespear's legation in 1152–3.

The formation of parishes and church building

In the missionary period Christian communities were formed by the missionaries themselves or the converts, many of whom belonged to the leading circles of society. Buildings in which the Christian cult could be celebrated were built by kings, magnates and Christian communities without any overall plan and regarded as their property (German *Eigenkirchen*). This continued to be true even after Christianity had prevailed as the official religion to the exclusion of other beliefs. Congregations formed around such proprietary churches did not have territorial boundaries; individuals attended the church that was most convenient for them.

The traditional view, particularly in Danish and Swedish historiography, was that local communities of free peasants were behind the building of churches and formation of parishes. Today, however, scholars generally tend to ascribe a greater role to magnates and the monarchy in early church-building and formation of local congregations until, eventually, the establishment of parishes became an internal ecclesiastical affair.

¹⁸ Seegrün, *Das Papsttum*, pp. 194–99; Nilsson, *Missionstid*, pp. 142–4.

In Scandinavia the introduction of tithes is generally believed to have been instrumental in creating territorial parishes. In the more developed high medieval churches the establishment of such parishes and their delimitation was decided by the bishop and the parishioners were obliged to avail themselves exclusively of the services of the parish priest or clergy. The decision of the fourth Lateran Council in 1215 that all Christians should go to confession and receive Holy Communion from their parish priest at least once annually was an important step in this direction.

In Denmark there was a period of intensive church-building from the eleventh century, mainly under the direction of magnates, kings, and bishops. The formation of territorial parishes seems to have started already in the second half of the century around the extant proprietary churches of magnates, though the details of this process are far from clear. At least in certain parts of the kingdom it appears that parishes were created according to an overall plan, such as in Fyn, where it has been shown by Erland Porsmose that churches were largely built at a regular distance from each other. The formation of parishes in Denmark was a remarkably rapid process, apparently helped by the introduction of the tithe from about 1100; it has even been maintained that territorial parishes did not exist before such taxation had been established. As shown by the church laws for Skåne and Sjælland the division into territorial parishes was completed by the end of the twelfth century when all of the more than 2,000 known parishes of Denmark had been established.¹⁹

The first elements of a Norwegian church organisation were introduced mainly from England, from where the main stream of Christian impulses flowed to Norway in the missionary period. St Olaf's English *hirð* bishop Grimkell, who is mentioned at the king's side as an initiator of the oldest Christian laws of Norway, was particularly important in this process which also involved the creation of the first local congregations.

The assumption that the earliest Christian communities in Norway emerged with the support of local magnates who in the tenth century protected missionaries and priests and built churches on their farms is not unreasonable but hard to prove. We are on firmer ground with the missionary kings Håkon the Good in the mid-tenth century and particularly Olaf Trygvason (995–1000) and Olaf Haraldsson (St Olaf, 1015–28). At least the two Olafs appear to have

19 Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', pp. 308–11; Brink, *Sockenbildning*, pp. 109–12, 120–1, 369; E. Porsmose, *Den regulerede landsby: Studier over bebyggelsesudviklingen på Fyn i tiden fra ca 1700 til ca 1000 e.Kr. fødsel* (Odense Studies in History and Social Sciences, 72, Odense, 1981), pp. 173–6, 421–3; E. Porsmose, *De fynske landsbyers historie – i dyrkningfællesskabets tid* (Odense, 1987), pp. 59–80.

been behind the building of so-called 'head churches' or 'county churches', presumably early regular baptismal and burial churches which were erected, one to four of them, within the old secular boundaries of the counties (ON *fylki*) which constituted the law provinces of western Norway and Trøndelag and the districts that were later called counties in eastern Norway. Such churches were built in central places and often on royal land, sometimes confiscated from chieftains and magnates who opposed the unification efforts of the monarchy; in Trøndelag some of the county churches were also built in connection with pagan cult centres. The Norwegian head and county churches appear to have had much in common with the English 'secular minsters', though it is uncertain whether they were collegiate.²⁰

However, people's need for churches could not in the long run be satisfied by the head or county churches which in western and eastern Norway served very large districts. All over the country kings and magnates had 'churches of convenience' (ON *hægendiskyrkjur*) erected on their estates and farms and in western and eastern Norway the peasants were made responsible for the upkeep of churches for smaller districts than those covered by the head churches; the peasants might also build such churches themselves, particularly in peripheral districts. During the twelfth century the head churches were thus crowded by a rising tide of churches of lower rank which, when served permanently by a priest, would attract their own congregations. The definite division into parishes covering the whole mainland kingdom of Norway seems to have taken place in the period 1150–1300, resulting in some 1,250 territorial units of this kind.

In Iceland, Greenland and Føroyar the proprietary church system was originally universal, as all churches were built privately by magnates and wealthy farmers on their farms (see Chapter 8(d)). When parishes were later created on the initiative of the bishops the private churches became parish churches. The bishop's allocation of tithe from the farms to the different churches defined

20 Brink, *Sockenbildning*, pp. 71, 109–11, 114, 116–22, 369; A. Taranger, *Den angelsaksiske kirkes indflydelse paa den norske* (Kristiania, 1890), pp. 267–61; Helle, 'Organization of the twelfth-century Norwegian church', pp. 50–2; C. Krag, *Vikingtid og rikssamling 800–1100* (Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norgeshistorie*, 2, Oslo, 1995), pp. 190–3; D. Skre, 'Missionary activity in early medieval Norway: strategy, organization and the course of events', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 23 (1998), pp. 13–8; M. Røskaft, 'Kultkontinuitet og tidlig kirkebygging i Trøndelag', in Rumar (ed.) *Helgonet i Nidaros*, pp. 230–9; E. Stene, 'Økonomi og samfunn i Inntrøndelag i jernalderen', in K. Gullberg (ed.), *Järnåldern i Mittnorden: Et symposium kring nya arkeologiska och ekologiska forskningsrön* (*Acta Antiqua Ostrobothniensia*, 3, Vasa, 1994), pp. 53–4; S. Brink, 'Tidig kyrklig organisation i Norden – aktörerna i sockenbildningen', in B. Nilsson (ed.), *Kristnandet i Sverige: Gamla källor och nya perspektiv* (*Projektet Sveriges kristnande, Publikationer*, 5, Uppsala, 1996), pp. 247–89.

the extent of the Icelandic parishes which did not always constitute continuous areas. The formation of parishes took place in the course of the twelfth century, after the payment of tithe had been introduced in 1096–7. Icelandic parish churches and their property remained in the hands of the church builders and their families until the end of the thirteenth century when the so-called *staðir*, consisting of farms owned completely by the churches standing on them, were subjected to the bishop's authority (see Chapter 12(c)).

In Sweden there were significant regional differences in the formation of parishes. In the southern part of the kingdom, in the provinces of Götaland, the development largely followed the Danish pattern while in the Mälars region and further north there were, to varying degrees, similarities with Norway.

In Väster- and Östergötland, evangelised in the early eleventh century, a great number of churches were erected within a short time-span, most of them proprietary churches built by local magnates, and this was also the case in the islands of Gotland and Öland. Among the church builders were the families who fought each other over the succession to the throne (Chapter 12(e)). In the period 1150–1250 territorial parishes emerged around the private churches, unconnected with earlier territorial structures. In Gotland, however, they came to consist of already extant local and natural settlements.²¹

In the provinces around Lake Mälaren it was earlier assumed that the formation of parishes was based on an older secular subdivision into administrative districts and that it started in the twelfth century and was completed in the thirteenth. However, it has been shown by Sigurd Rahmqvist that the process was more complicated than that, probably starting in the twelfth century with one royally built church in each of the hundreds on which the organisation of the naval levy was based. Such churches were intended to serve the population of their respective hundreds and may have corresponded to the English secular minsters and the Norwegian head or county churches, possibly with more than one priest each. A second phase started in the latter half of the twelfth century and continued to the end of the following century. New manorial and village churches were now built mainly on private initiative and new parishes formed around them. Such secondary parishes had no basis in earlier territorial structures and consisted of villages and hamlets that used the same church; in peripheral districts they comprised small natural settlements on whose initiative they were often created.²²

21 Brink, *Sockenbildning*, pp. 355–8.

22 S. Rahmqvist, *Sätessgård och gods: De medeltida frälsegodsens framväxt mot bakgrund av Upplands bebyggelsehistoria* (Uppsala Fornminnesförenings Tidskrift, 53, Uppsala, 1996), pp. 56–70, 304.

Further north, in the districts west of the Bothnian Sea and the Gulf of Bothnia, the formation of parishes had features in common with the Mälär provinces. In Norrland the twelfth century saw the establishment of a few central churches in cooperation between the monarchy and Church while local parishes emerged in the following century, generally consisting of earlier cult and *thing* associations. In several cases the church was built at or near pagan cult places.²³ In Jämtland, part of the Norwegian kingdom but ecclesiastically belonging to Sweden, a pagan place of sacrifice with remains of a bear offering has been found under the high altar of the church of Frösön.²⁴

Before the first elements of a church organisation were introduced in south-west Finland under the protection of Swedish arms there was in Finland Proper and Satakunta some organised Christian activity, as indicated by the remains of a couple of small buildings, probably bell-towers, from the first half of the twelfth century in Christian burial places. In the same provinces there are also traces of several small private churches from the early Christian period. However, such places of worship did not give rise to territorial parishes; these were rather created on the basis of pre-Christian communities.

Towards the end of the prehistoric period the settlements in the larger river valleys in south-west Finland formed communities for joint religious cult and secular collaboration, each of them with a common sacrificial grove (Finnish *hiisi*) and *thing*-stead and often a chieftain's farm (*moisio*) as well. Continuity from pagan to Christian places of worship was quite common, as shown by the fact that many medieval parish churches were built in or near pre-Christian sacrificial groves or burial grounds; the transfer of such groves to the Church is confirmed by a papal letter from the 1220s. Written evidence for parishes (*parochia*) survives from the 1230s in south-west Finland where most of them were presumably established during the thirteenth century, though some not until the early fourteenth century.

Parishes could not be created in other parts of Finland until these areas were incorporated in the Swedish realm from the mid-thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth centuries; here parish formation was still going on in the fifteenth century. In eastern Satakunta, Tavastland and western Karelia the connection between prehistoric settlements and medieval parishes was not so clear as in south-west Finland; it was not uncommon that the few large parishes there comprised several prehistoric settlements.

In the Finnish regions colonised from the mid-twelfth to the mid-fourteenth centuries by Christian immigrants from Sweden – i.e. Åland, the south-west

²³ Brink, *Sockenbildning*, pp. 351–8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

archipelago, Nyland and Österbotten – the formation of parishes differed from the pattern of the prehistoric Finnish settlements. In Åland, the south-west archipelago and western Nyland, purely or almost purely Swedish-speaking parishes were established, most of them apparently during the thirteenth century. In Åland and the archipelago this seems to have happened according to an overall plan so that the parishes came to comprise equally large numbers of farms. Further east, on the other hand, in eastern Nyland and western Karelia, a few large and bilingual parishes were created in the second half of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth, comprising both Swedes and Finns.²⁵

Before the middle of the fourteenth century no more than about seventy-five parishes with their own priests were established in Finland: this increased to about one hundred by the end of the Middle Ages, with only a few of them in the inland and eastern parts of the country. In peripheral parts of large parishes there were chapels without their own priests but with churchyards and the right to tithe from a certain area. At the end of the Middle Ages there were about thirty chapels of this type in Finland, visited a number of times annually by the parish priest, and there were such chapels in Swedish Norrland too.²⁶

The Finnish ecclesiastical situation in the late Middle Ages still resembled that of Norway and Sweden during the first phase of parish formation when there were only head churches or hundred churches serving large districts. The large Finnish congregations were not subdivided into smaller units until the late Middle Ages and early Modern Period.

The parish organisations which emerged in Scandinavia before the mid-thirteenth century were in many respects quite different, especially in terms of size (Table 13.1).²⁷

In Denmark parishes were very small and the distance between churches normally not more than 4–6 km, in Fyn on average not more than 2 km.²⁸

25 E. Orrman, 'Om territoriella organisationsprinciper i Sveariket', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 79 (1994), pp. 524–9; E. Orrman, 'Helsingin pitäjän ja Uudenmaan kirkollinen järjestäytyminen 1400-luvun loppuun mennessä', in M. T. Knapas (ed.), *Vantaan Pyhän Laurin kirkko 500 vuotta* (Sulkava, 1994), pp. 15–16.

26 Pirinen, *Keskiaika ja uskonpuhdistuksen aika*, p. 156.

27 Source for Denmark: A. E. Christensen, 'Danmarks befolkning og bebyggelse i middelalderen', in A. Schück (ed.), *Befolkning under medeltiden* (*Nordisk kultur*, 2, Oslo, 1938), pp. 16–21. Source for Norway: J. Gallén, 'Biskop', *KLNM*, 1 (1956), col. 619. Sources for Sweden: Brilioth, *Den senare medeltiden*, pp. 120, 493, 551, 554, 577, 582, 593, 598; L. O. Larsson, *Det medeltida Värend* (*Bibliotheca Historica Lundensis*, 12, Lund, 1964), pp. 80–3. Sources for Finland: Pirinen, *Medeltiden*, pp. 107–9; V. Niitemaa, 'Hämeen keskiaika', in *Hämeen historia*, 1 (Hämeenlinna, 1955), pp. 438, 454–7; S. Suvanto, *Keskiaika* (*Satakunnan historia*, 3, 1973), pp. 19–22.

28 E. Porsmose, *Den regulerede landsby*, p. 174.

Table 13.1 *The number and size of parishes in selected dioceses*

Countries and dioceses	Area (sq. km)	Number of parishes	Area per parish
<i>Denmark</i>			
Roskilde (excl. Rügen)	7,190	371	19.4
Odense	5,130	287	17.8
Lund	19,830	540	36.7
All Denmark	61,230	2,385	25.7
<i>Norway</i>			
Stavanger	36,900	150	246.0
<i>Sweden</i>			
Växjö	6,930	60	115.5
Skara	41,740	630	66.3
Linköping	40,300	492	81.9
Strängnäs	13,400	145	92.4
Västerås	39,890	60	665.0
Uppsala	c. 130,000 ^a	318	408.0
<i>Finland</i>			
Åbo	c. 100,000 ^a	75	1,333.0

Note: ^a Only colonised areas in Norrland and Finland are included; in Österbotten these are only roughly estimated.

Sources: See note 27. The land areas are taken from various works of reference.

Even some of the Swedish regions had particularly small parishes, such as Västergötland, with an average of 34 sq. km, and Gotland, with distances of only 3–5 km between churches.²⁹ In Norway parishes comprised far larger areas but many of them included extensive forest and mountain regions and had settlements only in limited areas. In the central and rich agricultural district of Romerike in eastern Norway there was an area of c. 56 sq. km per church, which is a better illustration of normal conditions than the average area per parish in the dioceses.

The largest parish areas were to be found in Finland and Swedish Norrland. In the diocese of Åbo the parishes averaged 1,400 sq. km but included large unsettled areas. Parishes in the relatively populous south-western parts of the diocese thus had much smaller areas: in Finland Proper parishes averaged c. 340 sq. km and in Åland c. 200 sq. km. In the northern, very sparsely settled parts of the diocese of Uppsala the parishes were significantly larger than the diocese average.

²⁹ Brink, *Sockenbildning*, fig. 15, p. 92.

Even in areas where parish churches were most widely dispersed it seems that the great majority of the parishioners were able, under favourable conditions, to reach the church and return home in one day, assuming that it was possible to do 30–50 km in a day. This was the situation in the Swedish province of Hälsingland, for example, where settlements were normally not more than 20 km away from the parish church, and in Jämtland this was due to the fact that settlements were concentrated in limited areas.³⁰ However, the interior parts of Finland were exceptions to this rule; here it was not uncommon for people to have to cover distances of more than 100 km to reach their parish church. In a description of the conditions in Savo and Karelia from 1504 it is reported that many peasants were living 15 'miles' (90 km) or more away from their parish church which they therefore only rarely visited, some only every third or fourth year, some never.³¹

In the Norse communities of the north Atlantic islands there were normally few farms in each parish. In Iceland, where evidence from various dates points towards a total number of 3,800–4,500 farms, there were c. 330 medieval parishes with their own priests, giving an average of only 11–14 farms per parish. Greenland had about 300 high medieval farms and 16 parishes, with approximately 20 farms per parish. The situation might be similar in other parts of Scandinavia but not in the large parish areas of northern Sweden and Finland where there was a much higher average number of farms per parish, in Finland roughly 140–220.³²

The effects of ecclesiastical teaching and control were to some extent dependent on the size of the parish areas and also on the number of parishioners per priest. In Norway the number of clerics around 1300 has been roughly estimated at well over 2,000, with one priest for every 175–225 persons. The number of consecrated Icelandic priests (i.e. excluding monks and lower clerical ranks) has been estimated at c. 430 in the Middle Ages, which means that in a total population of about 50,000 there would scarcely be 120 persons per priest.³³

30 Ibid., fig. 33, p. 172, fig. 81, pp. 356–7; S. Brink, 'Kristnande och kyrklig organisation i Jämtland', in S. Brink (ed.), *Jämtlands kristnande* (Uppsala, 1996), map, p. 173.

31 Brilioth, *Den senare medeltiden*, p. 617; Pirinen, *Medeltiden*, pp. 177–8.

32 B. Þórsteinsson, *Island* (København, 1985), p. 58; P. Nørlund, *De gamle nordbobygder ved verdens ende* (Odense, 1967), p. 29; E. Orrman, 'Ett försök att beräkna bebyggelsens omfattning i Finland vid utgången av högmedeltiden', in Haarstad et al. (eds.), *Innsikt og utsyn*, p. 140.

33 K. Helle, 'Down to 1536', in R. Danielsen et al., *Norway: A History from the Vikings to Our Own Times* (Oslo, 1995), p. 64; S. Bagge, 'Kirken og folket', in I. Semmingsen

Building in stone was introduced into Scandinavia by the Christian church (cf. Chapter 16). With the exception of defensive stone walls, wood had long been the only building material, supplemented by turf and stone in sparsely wooded and treeless districts in the north and west. The earliest Scandinavian churches were everywhere built in wood, often as stave churches, or in a combination of inner wooden constructions and outer, non-bearing walls of turf and stone, as was often the case in the Atlantic islands. It was, however, the highest goal of the Church to honour God by building in stone. Churches of higher rank, such as cathedrals, head churches, and other churches built by kings and bishops, were the first to be erected in stone; in all three kingdoms stone-built cathedrals are thus known from the second half of the eleventh century.

Building in stone was soon applied to town churches and in twelfth-century Denmark spread rapidly in the rural districts as well, so that all Danish congregations worshipped in stone or brick churches by the mid-thirteenth century. In Sweden stone did not come to dominate until the thirteenth century but never completely; many parishes in forested and otherwise peripheral regions continued to build their churches in wood.

In Norway wood continued to be the chief ecclesiastical building material throughout the Middle Ages; only about 270 of the more than 1,200 medieval churches known in Norway were built in stone, most of them in the most densely populated and economically most resourceful areas, particularly in Østlandet and Trøndelag but also in towns and other central places along the coastal sailing route. The Icelanders continued to build their churches in the time-honoured combination of wood, turf and stone; although work was started on two medieval stone churches it was never completed. The same church-building technique seems to have been used in Greenland and Føroyar, but Føroyar also saw the building of a stone church at the episcopal see of Kykjubøur and the start of work on a stone-built cathedral.

In Finland stone churches were rare until the mid-fifteenth century, as has been shown by Markus Hiekkänen. In the high Middle Ages they were only built in Åland, which saw the completion of four stone churches from the late thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth centuries, and in Åbo, whose cathedral, consecrated in 1300, was the only high medieval stone church in mainland Finland. More widespread building of Finnish stone churches only started

et al. (eds.), *Kaupang og katedral (Norges kulturhistorie, 2, Oslo, 1979)*, p. 216; Þórsteinsson, *Ísland*, p. 58; B. Teitsson and M. Stefánsson, 'Íslandsk ødegårdsforskning', in *Nasjonale forskningsoversikter (Det nordiske ødegårdsprosjekt, 1, København, 1972)*, p. 137.

in the fifteenth century, but many congregations had still to make do with wooden churches for the rest of the Middle Ages.³⁴

Religious orders and communities

The missionaries working in Scandinavia from the ninth century were in large part Benedictine monks who first arrived in Denmark from Frankia and later also from England, while Englishmen were predominant among the missionaries in Norway. However, Benedictine monasteries were not established in Scandinavia until Christianity had proved its permanence. The first Nordic religious houses were a couple of Benedictine monasteries established in Denmark towards the end of the eleventh century, but most Benedictine houses originated in the following century.

Everywhere in Scandinavia the first monks were foreigners, in Denmark mainly from Germany and in Norway from eastern England. The majority of the Benedictine houses were situated in the southern and western parts of the region, in Denmark and Norway and even in Iceland and Greenland. The Swedish kingdom saw the establishment of no more than two Benedictine monasteries, one of them a nunnery which later became Cistercian and the other a short-lived fraternity of English monks at Old Uppsala, which in the latter half of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries functioned as a regular cathedral chapter. One of the Norwegian and at least one of the Danish Benedictine houses were affiliated to the Cluny movement and some of the Danish houses became Cistercian in the twelfth century.³⁵

The twelfth century saw the establishment of Augustinian, Cistercian and Premonstratensian houses. Augustinian convents were founded in Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and even one in Greenland. Denmark, Norway and Sweden received their first Cistercian monasteries in the years 1143–6, in Denmark and Sweden at the initiative of Archbishop Eskil of Lund who was a personal friend of Bernard of Clairvaux. The first Cistercian monastery in Denmark was a daughter foundation of Cîteaux, while the order's earliest houses in Sweden received their first brothers from Clairvaux. In Norway the first Cistercian monasteries were daughters of English abbeys, Fountains in Yorkshire and

34 M. Hiekkänen, *Stone Churches of the Medieval Diocese of Åbo: A Systematic Classification and Chronology* (Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen Aikakauskirja, 101, Helsinki, 1994), pp. 250–6; M. Hiekkänen, 'Stenkyrkorna i Åbo stift under medeltiden', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 79 (1994), pp. 443–53; E. Orrman, 'Notes on the accounts of Tyrvää church as a source on the history of construction of the church', *Fennoscandia archaeologia*, 14 (1997), pp. 53–6.

35 J. Gallén, 'Benediktinorden', *KLNM*, 1 (1956), cols. 451–5.

Table 13.2 *Monastic foundations in Scandinavia, c. 1350, by country*

Country	Benedict.		August.		Cisterc. ^a		Premons.		Johann.	Total	
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	m	f ^b
Denmark	13	15	8	2	11(8)	2(1)	5	1	6	40	19
Norway	3	4	5	1	3	1(?)	2	—	1	14	5
Iceland	3	2	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	2
Greenland	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Orkney	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
Sweden	1	1	—	—	5	7(6)	—	—	1	7	7
Finland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes: ^a New Cistercian foundations are put in brackets, the others were originally Benedictine foundations.

^b m, f = male, female.

Sources: See notes 35–6; B. Þórsteinsson, *Island* (København, 1985), p. 58; and J. France, *The Cistercians in Scandinavia* (Cistercian Studies Series, 131, Kalamazoo, 1992), Appendix 1.

Kirkstead in Lincolnshire. The Premonstratensians were also invited by Archbishop Eskil to Scandinavia in the 1150s but were not as important as the Augustinians and Cistercians and had only a few monasteries in Denmark and Norway.³⁶

The monastic foundations in Scandinavia before the middle of the fourteenth century are listed in Table 13.2.

Some of the Danish Benedictine foundations later became Cistercian, and the only Cistercian nunnery in Norway may also have originally been a Benedictine house. Monastic foundations were lacking in Finland in the high Middle Ages; they had largely lost their expansive power towards the end of the twelfth century when the first elements of Finnish ecclesiastical organisation were introduced. There is not sufficient evidence for a complete chronological listing of Scandinavian monastic foundations.

Monastic orders developed in the same fashion in Scandinavia as elsewhere in western Europe. Several Benedictine and Cistercian foundations became quite affluent through liberal donations of land from royal houses and magnates. This meant that the Cistercians could not maintain their ideal of

36 J. Gallén, 'Augustinkorherrar', *KLNM*, 1 (1956), cols. 280–3; L. Gjerløw and J. Gallén, 'Cisterciensorden', *KLNM*, 2 (1957), cols. 565–73; J. Gallén and T. Dahlerup, 'Johannitor-den', *KLNM*, 7 (1962), cols. 600–6; J. Nybo Rasmussen, 'Præmonstratensorden', *KLNM*, 13 (1968), cols. 550–4.

working their lands themselves. Nunneries of all orders were aristocratic institutions providing for the upkeep of the unmarried daughters of the privileged élite. Although it was not an immediate goal of the monastic institutions to play a role in secular society they nevertheless came to function as channels for European cultural influences. Monasteries and nunneries became centres of literacy even if their activities in this field were primarily for internal use. Among the monastic orders only the Premonstratensians actively sought to save lay people's souls, but the same possibility was also open to the Augustinians, ordained as priests. This function could be carried out by a monastery taking over the ecclesiastical responsibility for a congregation (*parochia incorporata*), which happened in Denmark. Among the high medieval orders devoting themselves to the care of the sick only the Johannites gained a foothold in Scandinavia with houses in Denmark, Norway and Sweden from the 1160s.³⁷

In the course of the twelfth century the old monastic orders lost much of the dynamism and expansive power that had characterised them in the preceding two or three centuries, and for the Cistercians in Denmark the fourteenth century was a difficult period.³⁸ The thirteenth century saw the rise of the mendicant orders – the Franciscans and Dominicans – whose aim was to propagate the Gospel among the broader population, mainly in towns, and in the case of the Dominicans to combat heresy. The Dominicans established their first convent in Scandinavia in 1223, with the support of Archbishop Andreas Sunesen of Lund, and a separate Scandinavian province of the order, Dacia, was created as early as 1228. The Franciscans were somewhat later, arriving from Germany in Denmark in 1232 and establishing their own province of Dacia in 1239.³⁹

The most expansive period of the Dominicans in Scandinavia was between 1223 and 1250 when twenty of their thirty-one high medieval convents were established; the rest were added more slowly up to the 1330s. The Franciscans had their most dynamic period in the 1230s when thirteen of their Scandinavian houses were founded. Their expansion continued steadily until the end of the thirteenth century when there were thirty-six foundations. Denmark, with its relatively large number of towns, was the main Scandinavian base of both orders, with a total of twenty Franciscan houses and sixteen Dominican convents

37 B. P. McGuire, *The Cistercians in Denmark: Their Attitude, Roles, and Functions in Medieval Society* (Cistercian Studies Series, 35, Kalamazoo, 1982); France, *The Cistercians*.

38 McGuire, *The Cistercians*, pp. 186–7, 215–19.

39 On the mendicants in Scandinavia, see J. Gallén, *La province de Dacie de l'Ordre Frères Prêcheurs*, 1 (Institutum Historicum FF Prædicatorum. *Dissertationes Historicae*, 12, Helsingfors, 1946); J. Gallén, 'Dominikanorden', *KLNM*, 3, (1958), cols. 174–85; J. Gallén, 'Franciskanorden', *KLNM*, 4 (1959), cols. 563–73.

before 1350; the corresponding numbers were eleven Franciscan and eleven Dominican for Sweden, and five and three respectively for Norway, whereas mendicant foundations were absent in the Atlantic island communities and were represented by only one Dominican convent in Finland. Nunneries of the two orders were exceptional in Scandinavia and only to be found in Denmark (three) and Sweden (two).

Through their advanced teaching, based on their links with universities, the mendicant orders contributed significantly to raising the educational level of the Scandinavian clergy. As elsewhere in Europe their evangelical work was mainly carried out in towns, but as these were relatively small and few in number in Scandinavia while the rural parishes in many regions were very extensive, mendicant preaching and the cure of souls gained importance in certain rural regions as well, particularly among fishermen and seafaring people in the archipelagos and coastal districts.⁴⁰ Because the mendicants poached on the preserves of the secular clergy both in the cure of souls and the income derived from it, a tense relationship between the two parties developed in some places, for instance in Bergen. On the other hand, their positive influence on the episcopal church is shown by the fact that the Dominican liturgy became the official liturgy of Åbo diocese.

In western and central Europe religious houses in the latter part of the high Middle Ages were not able to receive all the women, unmarried or widows, who wanted to devote their lives to the Christian ideal of piety or for which such houses provided maintenance. Consequently, from about 1200 there emerged in northern France, southern Germany and Flanders female sisterhoods whose members, so-called beguines, led a pious life devoted to work and deeds of charity without belonging to an order or being bound by vows; there were also beguines who followed this religious lifestyle while living in their own homes. The movement spread rapidly to eastern Europe, but in Scandinavia it had scarcely any impact, only reaching Denmark and Sweden in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Of their male equivalents, the beghards, there is no mention in Scandinavia.⁴¹

Church and monarchy

In the period following the conversion of Scandinavia the Church organisations of the various kingdoms and regions were highly dependent on rulers and

40 J. Gallén, *Finland i medeltidens Europa: Valda uppsatser* (Helsingfors, 1998), pp. 135–8, 142–7.

41 M. Johansen, 'Beginer i Danmark', in E. Waaben et al. (eds.), *Fromhed & verdslighed i middelalder og renaissance: Festskrift til Thelma Jexlev* (Odense, 1985), pp. 18–22.

magnates. The universal practice of the Catholic Church, supported by the various extant collections of Canon Law, had little effect on social conditions except for the banning of pagan religious practices.

The situation changed when the Nordic church provinces were established in the twelfth century; the churches of Denmark, Norway and Sweden now began to free themselves from their subordination to kings. Thanks to their religious authority, the archbishops had the potential to challenge royal power. The three archiepiscopal sees were founded at a time when the Gregorian reform movement was at its most dynamic. The papacy claimed to be the protector of kings and even to be their regular feudal overlord, a policy which culminated under Innocent III (1198–1216) with the claim at the fourth Lateran Council in 1215 that secular princes were subordinate to the papacy.

As shown above, the Nordic church provinces owed their establishment to a papal policy that sought to bring the churches on the periphery of Europe into a more directly subordinate relationship with Rome. Most archbishops were active promoters of the liberating principles of Canon Law which were developed as an effective weapon in the hands of the Gregorian reformers, gaining in strength and unity through the fundamental systematising work of Gratian in his *Decretum* around 1140. In Scandinavia as elsewhere in Europe the increasing ecclesiastical claims to freedom from secular authority (*libertas ecclesiae*) and the right to determine social morality led to clashes of interest and conflicts in the high Middle Ages. The tension was heightened by the conflict between customary Scandinavian law, which did not easily admit changes, and church law, which adapted to Scandinavian social norms by making frequent and fundamental legal changes.

The dependence of the Nordic churches on royal power decreased as they developed a more effective and better centralised parallel to secular government and were able to impose their own forms of taxation. In the latter part of the high Middle Ages the Scandinavian realms, like western and central European kingdoms and principalities, came to function as dually organised societies with separate secular and ecclesiastical governmental systems, each claiming legislative and judicial authority, so that the Church appeared almost as a state within the state. Its demands for increased public authority and economic rights gained ground particularly in periods when pretenders fought each other and were willing to make concessions to ecclesiastical leaders in return for their support. Conversely, the Church had to accept limitations and also set-backs when royal power was consolidated. In this respect the high medieval Nordic churches suffered much the same fate despite important differences in their relations with secular powers.

In twentieth-century research the relationship between the monarchy and Church in Denmark from the latter part of the eleventh century to the second half of the twelfth (cf. Chapters 8(b) and 12(b)) was for a long time dominated by the interpretation of the Swedish historian Lauritz Weibull, who saw a fundamental antagonism between, on the one hand, the old democratic Danish society in alliance with a Church inspired by Gregorian ideas and, on the other hand, a strong, anti-democratic royal power opposed to the claims for ecclesiastical freedom. According to this view King Knud Svensen (1080–6), the royal saint, was a protagonist of a strong monarchy and the continued royal leadership of an independent Danish national church, and was in the most extreme interpretation, a tyrant who threatened both popular and ecclesiastical freedom. The leaders of the democratic-Gregorian front against this royal policy were considered to be the archbishops of Lund, particularly Eskil (1137–77) who in 1161 was forced into exile for his fidelity to Pope Alexander III.⁴²

This interpretation has been questioned by the Danish historian Carsten Breengaard who adheres to the view, quite common in recent research, that the old Danish society was hierarchical, kin-based, and consequently dominated by the leaders of powerful families. As the clergy were not included in the networks of kinship they led an insecure life, exposed to persecution by the rich and powerful in traditional society. Consequently, the Church had to seek the protection and support of the monarchy, thereby giving ideological support to a strong royal power and the banning of feuds. The monarchy and Church were thus aligned against the old society dominated by chieftains and magnates. It was in a Christian spirit that St Knud acted against the traditional leaders; his intention was to pacify society and secure the position of the Church. According to Breengaard the Church was not yet a strong power in Danish society. It was dependent on the monarchy and the political importance of the two first archbishops, Asser (1103–37) and Eskil, had previously been greatly exaggerated.⁴³

In the last decades of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, under the archbishops Absalon (1177–1201) and Andreas Sunesen (1201–22), there was a community of interests between the monarchy and Church who joined each other in the Baltic expansion of the kingdom. Absalon played a leading political role as a royal counsellor and originator of military projects and Andreas Sunesen functioned as governor of the conquered Estonia.

42 Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus*, pp. 122–49, 264–8.

43 Christensen, 'Tiden 1042–1241', p. 245; Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus*, p. 126.

In contrast with the situation in the other Scandinavian kingdoms the relations between the Danish monarchy and Church in the high Middle Ages acquired a clearly feudal character. The bishops owed the king service and had to pay him homage even after Pope Innocent III had banned such oaths of allegiance. The service of the bishops was important to the kings as they were enfeoffed with the royal incomes from several towns and numerous rural districts, *skipæn* and *herreder* (cf. Chapter 8(b)), and even shared the privilege of minting.⁴⁴

As shown above (Chapter 12(b)) the relations between the Danish royal power and the church leaders changed for the worse after King Valdemar II's death in 1241. From the 1250s Archbishop Jacob Erlandsen strove to assert the rights of the Church and to make it a *de facto* sovereign state within the state. This resulted in confrontation with the monarchy over such issues as the military obligations of the bishop, the bishop's tithe, and the reform of church law in the archiepiscopal diocese in accordance with the latest demands of Canon Law, for example by replacing compurgation with inquisitorial proceedings. In his conflict with the monarchy the archbishop invoked the doctrine of the two swords, each of them possessing legislative authority but with preference for ecclesiastical over secular law. However, despite the support of the papacy, it was not possible for Jacob Erlandsen to achieve his ends.

The conflict between the Danish church and monarchy was revived under Archbishop Jens Grand (1289–1302). The great issue in his quest for ecclesiastical freedom was whether and to what extent the archbishop owed the king military service for his lands and fiefs. The archbishop could not be militarily defeated at his castle Hammershus on the island of Bornholm, but the bitter conflict nevertheless ended in his political defeat, brought about not least by the difficult position of Pope Boniface VIII which made it imperative for him to maintain friendly relations with the Danish king. The confrontation between the Church and monarchy continued under Archbishop Esger Juul (1310–15).⁴⁵

In Norway the dependency of the Church on the monarchy is abundantly clear in the period following the official conversion to Christianity. The picture derived from the early Christian laws and sagas is that of a national church under the authority of the king which, at the same time, is strongly dependent on the peasant society into which it has been incorporated. The first bishops

44 C. G. Andræ, *Kyrka och fräls i Sverige under äldre medeltid* (Studia Historica Upsaliensia, 4, Uppsala, 1960), pp. 35–42.

45 Andersen, *Senmiddelalderen*, pp. 41–4; H. Paludan. 'Tiden 1241–1340', in Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, pp. 480–7.

were attached to the king's *hirð* or retinue, and in the first half of the twelfth century were still appointed by him.⁴⁶

From the 1140s there are, however, indications of a reform movement within the Norwegian church that desired the establishment of a native archiepiscopal see. When this happened in 1152/3 Cardinal Nicolaus Brekespear was able to obtain royal consent to greater ecclesiastical freedom in fields that were particularly important to the Gregorian reformers (for more details of this and the following relationship between the monarchy and Church in Norway, see Chapter 12(c)). Although the gains of the Church in 1252/3 were not undisputed, the establishment of the archiepiscopal see was a decisive step towards a new power balance in Norway. This became clear in the days of Archbishop Eystein Erlendsson (1161–88) who, through his support of King Magnus Erlingsson, was able to further develop the reforms of 1152/3 and to establish the idea of kingship as a divine office that should be controlled by the Church.

The gains of the Church in the preceding decades were threatened by King Sverre Sigurdsson (1177–1202) who wanted to return to the ecclesiastical situation before 1152/3 and whose bitter conflict with the Church ended in a stalemate at his death. In the following decades church leaders worked consistently to end the Civil Wars in Norway and thus helped to establish the strong and undisputed monarchy of the Sverre family, represented by Håkon Håkonsson (1217–63), his son and grandsons. The church leaders had to accept that within the governmental framework of the consolidated monarchy there was no room for such a politically independent and influential Church as in the days of Archbishop Eystein.

Nevertheless, the monarchy was willing to acknowledge a considerable degree of internal ecclesiastical autonomy, a policy that culminated in the Tønsberg Concordat of 1277, granting the Church greater legal and economic rights than it had ever previously received. These rights were partly contested by the baronial council ruling on behalf of the young King Eirik Magnusson (1289–99) and were never completely restored in the high Middle Ages. However, the fact that their legal limits continued to be contested did not prevent peace being restored between the monarchy and Church after a bitter but passing conflict in the early 1280s. One important feature of these relations was the political cooperation between the two parties, with the bishops serving as royal counsellors and other clerics taking part in royal administration and diplomacy.

46 Helle, 'Organization of the twelfth-century Norwegian church', pp. 47–50.

In Sweden there is little precise evidence about the relations that existed between the monarchy and the Church before the middle of the thirteenth century. Generally, it appears that the Church was strongly dependent on royal power. This is revealed by the fact that episcopal elections were still decisively influenced by the monarchy in the first half of the thirteenth century and that the bishops still paid homage to the king.⁴⁷ It is true that early thirteenth-century kings promised the Swedish church jurisdiction over its personnel and freedom from contributions to the Crown, but the latter condition was hardly observed during the following half century of governmental shifts. King Magnus Birgersson (1275–90), who won the throne with ecclesiastical support, cooperated closely with church leaders and granted the Church exemption from ordinary royal taxation and other privileges. As had happened in Norway a decade earlier, there was a reaction against Magnus' concessions to the Church from the governing aristocratic circle which was centred on his son Birger (1290–1318), but in the privileges granted to the Church by Birger in 1305 the rights won by the Church in his father's reign were largely kept. However, in the following half-century it was not possible for the Church to increase its privileges much further (Chapter 12(d)).

The ecclesiastical demands for immunities and rights of various kinds culminated in the second half of the thirteenth century. To a large extent these demands were met, but there were soon counter-reactions because the secular aristocracy and the monarchy felt threatened by the economic resources and autonomy of the Church. Around the turn of the century a *modus vivendi* was established between the monarchy and Church which lasted in the main until the end of the Middle Ages. The reformatory ardour of St Peter's successors on the papal see had now cooled and been replaced by a spirit of *realpolitik* in which economic interests were decisive. This made it possible for the monarchy to bring about compromises in various disputes through direct contact with the papal curia.

The conditions for ecclesiastical autonomy

A central element in the efforts of the western Church to liberate itself from secular society was priestly celibacy, which was finally enacted as part of Canon Law by the second Lateran Council in 1139. The demand for celibacy met with strong opposition in Scandinavia where the marriage of priests had been common since the conversion and was accepted by native law. The first demands for

⁴⁷ Andrä, *Kyrka och frälse*, p. 151.

celibacy were put forward in early twelfth-century Denmark, and in Norway the first cautious steps in that direction were taken by Nicolaus Brekespear in 1152/3. Eventually the bishops, under strong pressure from the papacy, succeeded in putting an end to priestly marriages, though they persisted in Iceland and Sweden as late as the thirteenth century; in Iceland there were still married bishops at that time. What proved impossible, however, was to root out priestly concubinage, which despite great efforts by zealous bishops, was not uncommon until the end of the Middle Ages.⁴⁸

Another important goal of the Gregorian reform movement was to put an end to secular intervention in the election of bishops and appointment of priests. The decisive role played by kings in the official conversion of the Scandinavian kingdoms and the early organisation of their churches involved royal appointment of bishops, a practice that is clearly evidenced in Denmark and in Norway where King Harald Hard-ruler (1046–66) was apparently inspired by the caesaro-papist practices experienced during his service in Byzantium.⁴⁹ The concordat of Worms between the emperor and papacy in 1122 had effects even in Scandinavia, promoting the influence of cathedral chapters, where they existed, on episcopal elections, but not substantially weakening the royal grip on the selection of bishops.

In Denmark the king's consent to episcopal elections remained obligatory throughout the high Middle Ages and the bishops' obligation to serve him was still maintained in the fourteenth century. The Norwegian cathedral chapters established from 1152/3 were intended to take over the election of bishops which they largely did in the thirteenth century but without excluding royal influence on important elections. The Icelandic bishops were originally elected by the clergy and people at the *Althing*, which in practice meant that the decision was taken by the leading chieftains, but this was later transferred to the archbishop of Trondheim. In Sweden, where the bishops were even invested with ring and crozier by the king, royal influence persisted for a long time. The Swedish chapter organisation initiated by Cardinal Wilhelm of Sabina in 1248 was intended to eliminate the intervention of kings and magnates in the selection of bishops, but their formal election by the chapters could no more eliminate the royal influence in Sweden than in the other kingdoms. In the thirteenth century the papacy also started to intervene in Scandinavian episcopal elections, thereby reducing the influence of both kings and chapters.

48 J. Gallén, 'Celibat', *KLNM*, 2 (1957), cols. 545–8.

49 Seegrün, *Das Papsttum*, pp. 71–2.

The first Scandinavian bishops were foreigners except in Iceland, but natives soon came to dominate. They frequently belonged to leading families which produced a number of bishops, notably in Denmark and Iceland, whereas in Norway bishops often had family roots in the lower echelons of the secular aristocracy or the upper strata of peasant society. In Denmark the two first archbishops, Asser and Eskil, belonged to the prominent Trugot family; later, seven members of the Hvide/Galen family dominated the archiepiscopal see of Lund between 1177 and 1355.⁵⁰ In Iceland members of the allied families of *Haukdælir* and *Oddaverjar* dominated both episcopal sees for a long time (Chapter 8(d)), but after 1238 Norwegian-born bishops were appointed from Trondheim (Chapter 12(c)). In Finland, the high medieval bishops were all Swedish born, with the exception of the first bishop, the Englishman Thomas, and two natives.

The kings, magnates and rural communities who built the first churches in Scandinavia also assumed the right to appoint priests, a practice that was soon challenged by the church leaders to the advantage of the bishops' authority in these matters. In Norway the ecclesiastical reforms of the 1150s and 1160s, though contested by King Sverre, resulted in the commutation of the proprietary rights of church builders and their successors into the canonical right of patronage (*ius patronatus*), allowing them to present priestly candidates for consecration by the bishop. The bishop's authority in the appointment of the parish clergy increased throughout the high Middle Ages and from the 1270s his sole right of appointment was maintained; however, the wishes of the congregations could never be completely overlooked. The Swedish church province saw a similar development: the congregation had the right to present candidates but the decision rested with the bishop. For a short time after the conversion there were many foreign priests in Scandinavia because under church law priestly consecration was dependent on Christian parentage. However, native-born priests soon came to dominate the parish clergy completely.

The Gregorian reformers claimed that church law was superior to secular law, and it was consequently the goal of the high medieval Scandinavian churches to acquire legislative authority in ecclesiastical matters, including the moral and religious norms of society. The best evidence of the outcome of

50 Absalon, 1177–1201; Andreas Sunesen, 1201–22; Jacob Erlandsen, 1253–74; Erland Erlandsen, 1274–6; Jens Grand, 1289–1302; Carl Eriksen Røde, 1325–34; Peder Jensen Galen, 1336–55; see P. Ingeman, 'Middelalderens danske bispesegl og deres heraldik', in T. O. Christensen et al. (eds.), *Slægter, Skjolde, Steder: Festskrift til Knud Prange* (Odense, 1990), tab. 1, p. 121.

this programme derives from Norway. Here the earliest Christian laws, regulating the observance of Christianity and the relations between Church and society, were part of the provincial legislation of the *lawthings* which meant that the bishops, supported by the monarchy, had to reach agreements with the representatives of peasant society about the legal rules that were to apply in ecclesiastical matters. Eventually this resulted in separate Christian sections of the provincial law codes being written down, probably from the latter part of the eleventh century.

In the second half of the thirteenth century the right of King Magnus Lawmender to participate with the bishops in reforming the Christian law sections of the provincial laws was contested by Archbishop Jon the Red (1268–82) who claimed the sole right to legislate in these matters, which the medieval monarchy could never bring itself to accept. The result was an unclear legal situation with competing Christian law versions in which it became the official attitude of the monarchy that the ‘old’ Christian laws from before the days of Archbishop Jon and King Magnus should apply. This did not prevent the Norwegian church from producing its own legal rules within the framework of internal church law by adapting papal decrees and canons of the General Church Councils and regulating Christian behaviour through provincial statutes and bishops’ pastoral letters.⁵¹

In Denmark the church laws for Skåne and Sjælland from the 1170s had the character of agreements between the respective bishops and the inhabitants of the dioceses without a trace of the royal influence revealed in the earlier Norwegian Christian laws (Chapter 12(b)). In Sweden too the rules of the provincial codes concerning Christianity and the relations between Church and society were compromises between ecclesiastical and secular interests without any involvement of royal power. As had happened in Norway during the preparation of King Magnus Lawmender’s national Landlaw, the preparatory work on the corresponding Swedish Landlaw of 1347 (cf. Chapter 12(d)) led to a conflict between the monarchy and Church which resulted in the absence of a separate section of Christian laws in the new national code.

Closely connected with the aspirations of the Church to legislate in its own domain was its demand for jurisdiction over its own personnel and over lay people in ‘spiritual’ matters of particular concern to the Church. *Privilegium fori*, which meant that ecclesiastical courts should adjudicate in all cases between or against clerics, both criminal and civil, was already established in Denmark

51 K. Helle, *Norge blir en stat 1130–1319* (*Handbok i Norges historie*, 3, Bergen, 1974), pp. 18, 137, 226–7, 237, 252; Helle, ‘Down to 1536’, p. 81.

by the first half of the twelfth century and in Norway probably largely in the second half of the twelfth century, while the first Swedish indications of the same privilege date from around 1200. Jurisdiction over lay people in *causae spirituales*, concerning violations of the legal rules for the observance of Christianity and particularly disputes over the economic and legal rights of the Church, was harder to obtain and consequently emerged more slowly than *privilegium fori*. In Norway the right of ecclesiastical courts to adjudicate in spiritual matters was claimed from the latter half of the twelfth century but was not clearly defined and accepted until the Tønsberg Concordat of 1277, only to be contested in the following conflict between the monarchy and Church so that its legal limits were disputed for the rest of the Middle Ages.

Financial control over the churches and their property was a necessary condition for a free and autonomous Church. There is little evidence for the way in which this was achieved, except in Iceland where the proprietary church system was not seriously reduced until the late thirteenth century. In Denmark this system is not clearly evidenced at all in extant sources but in Norway and Sweden it appears that it had to finally give way in the second half of the twelfth and the early decades of the thirteenth centuries, respectively. The way was then open for the Church to become a dominant economic factor in all three kingdoms, though it should be noted that its properties and incomes were not administered centrally but divided among a great number of autonomous foundations. Taken together, the incomes of the various institutions were above all derived from two sources: landed property fully or partly exempt from royal taxation, and the church's own right of taxation. In addition, there were also the important fines and confiscations derived from violations of Christian laws.

In the early Christian period the economy of ecclesiastical institutions was secured by donations of land from kings and magnates, which was supplemented by the lands acquired by local churches. Landed donations were, however, limited by the rules of native law protecting the right of kin to land. Consequently, it was part of the early policy of the Gregorian reformers in Scandinavia to reduce such limitations, which met with strong opposition. In the second half of the twelfth century the Danish church succeeded in carrying through its demand that half a 'head share' – (*hovedlod*) i.e. is half a son's share of the inheritance – could be bequeathed or given away. In Norway and Iceland the Church was never able to gain acceptance for more than the right of landowners – initiated by Cardinal Nicolaus Brekespear in 1152–3 but only gradually carried through – to donate one-tenth of inherited and one-quarter of self-acquired land; the claims of Archbishop Jon to a larger share in the 1270s

were rejected. In Sweden the laws of the Göta provinces were the most liberal, allowing for gifts of up to a full head share. Most *Svea* laws would not accept more than the donation of one-tenth of inherited land if the heirs in question did not consent to more, but did not limit donations of self-acquired land.⁵²

We saw in Chapter 10 that the landed property of ecclesiastical institutions reached great proportions in the high Middle Ages, in Norway perhaps as much as 40 per cent of all land according to value. In Denmark and Sweden the ecclesiastical shares of land cannot be roughly estimated until the end of the Middle Ages when they are assumed to have comprised 35–40 per cent and c. 25 per cent of the total number of farms, respectively. At that time the Norwegian share may have risen to c. 48 per cent, while in Iceland it has been estimated at about 45 per cent. In Finland the lands of the medieval Church never came to comprise more than a few percentages of the total number of farms (Chapter 19). The episcopal sees with their cathedrals and chapters, together with the most affluent monasteries, were the largest ecclesiastical landowners.

The ecclesiastical economy in all three kingdoms was greatly improved by the tax exemptions of the Church which reached their final extent and character in the latter half of the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth centuries (see Chapters 8(d) and 12(b)–12(d)). Whereas in Denmark and Sweden the tax exemption of ecclesiastical institutions (and nobles) included their tenants, in Norway this was limited to secular clerics in person, each with two members of his household, and to fixed numbers of the bishops' non-clerical retainers; in practice this meant that the persons and institutions in question were only exempt from tax on farms worked on their own account, not tenanted farms. In all kingdoms the ecclesiastical institutions and their personnel were only exempted from the regular royal taxes on land or persons, not from the extraordinary taxation that was introduced from the thirteenth century.⁵³

Besides landed property the Church's most important source of income was the tithe.⁵⁴ It was an early goal of the Church to establish this form of taxation and it was first introduced, in Iceland, in 1096–7. Denmark appears to have followed suit in the early twelfth century but the first piece of evidence is from 1135. In Norway King Sigurd Crusader (d. 1130) gave his support to the

52 H. Nielsen et al., 'Testamente', *KLNM*, 18 (1974), cols. 218–33.

53 Andræ, *Kyrka och frälse*, pp. 23–34, 49–62.

54 L. Hamre et al., 'Tiend', *KLNM*, 18 (1974), cols. 280–300; I. Nylander, *Das kirchliche Benefizialwesen Schwedens während des Mittelalters* (Rättshistoriskt bibliotek, 4, Stockholm, 1953), pp. 205–53; K. Pirinen, *Kymmenysverotus Suomessa ennen kirkkoreduktiota* (*Historiallisia Tutkimuksia*, 55, Helsinki, 1962).

introduction of the tithe but it was not made legally binding until the 1160s at the earliest; after that it was paid all over the kingdom with the exception of certain peripheral districts. In Sweden the payment of tithe was introduced in the second half of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries, in Finland not until the mid-thirteenth century. Normally, the tithe replaced older dues and fees paid to the bishops and priests, but not all of them everywhere.

The tithe was not introduced as a finished and complete system. The way it was distributed was neither uniform nor constant. For example, the bishop's part of the tithe in Denmark was not introduced in the dioceses of Roskilde and Lund until the 1170s at the earliest, and in some other dioceses the bishops had to content themselves with a fixed and less lucrative fee called 'bishop's gift' until the end of the Middle Ages. In Norway and Iceland the tithe was shared equally by the bishop, the parish priest, the parish church and the poor. Partition into four was common in Sweden too, but here the relative size of the shares could vary. In thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Sweden the cathedral chapters appropriated most of the poor's tithe, which was in accordance with the canonical principle that lay people should not share in the tithe. In the diocese of Åbo, comprising all of Finland, the tithe was divided between three parties: the bishop, the parish priest and the parish church.

The tithe was mostly paid from the yields of arable cultivation but also from animal husbandry (butter), fishing and hunting. The Church tried to extend it to all types of income but never quite managed this because of popular opposition. The Norwegian archbishop Jon the Red was particularly active in demanding 'new tithes' in the 1270s, but without permanent success. Tithes from less central economic activities could be commuted into fixed fees. In Sweden the tithe from many parishes was still negotiated at the end of the Middle Ages; the amount depended on the distance from the cathedral and was certainly less than 10 per cent. In Finland the southern and western districts paid the ordinary agrarian tithe while people in the interior, where hunting and fishing dominated, paid fixed and less heavy dues which were agreed with the recipients. Such negotiated dues had their nearest parallels in the Baltic region and among the west Slavs along the eastern border of western Christendom (*decima constituta*).⁵⁵ In Iceland the tithe was a capital tax amounting to 1 per cent of the annually estimated value of property and chattels which were assumed to yield an income of 10 per cent.

From the thirteenth century the papal curia taxed the western churches in various ways, for example by demanding tithe for the support of crusades.

55 Pirinen, *Kymmenysverotus Suomessa*, pp. 13–17, 221–3, 252–3.

This changed the relations between the Church and monarchy as Scandinavian monarchs were able to reach agreements with Rome by which they could dispose of parts of the papal taxes as loans or in other forms.⁵⁶

Christianity and the people

The doctrines and moral code of the Church influenced people's lives throughout the Middle Ages. Universal ideas shared by western Christendom were spread by ecclesiastical teaching and regulations at the cost of pagan customs and ideas. To what extent the teaching of the Church managed to change Scandinavian mentality is nevertheless uncertain and a matter of discussion (see also below, Chapter 14).

The fundamental Christian doctrines seem to have replaced pagan conceptions quite rapidly. Heaven and hell soon came to dominate people's ideas of the afterlife and there is little or no evidence after 1200 for any continued belief in Valhalla, Hel (the pre-Christian land of the dead), or the family mound as the place of the baptised after death. One of the intentions of the Iclander Snorri Sturluson in writing his *Edda* in the first half of the thirteenth century (cf. Chapter 14) was to preserve the knowledge of Nordic mythology for future skalds.⁵⁷

With the exception of Finland there is no evidence for the cult of the higher deities of the Nordic pagan Olympus in the late Middle Ages and early Modern Period, but the belief in other supernatural beings inherent in nature did not disappear in Scandinavia.⁵⁸ In Finland the chief deities lived on in people's minds so that by the mid-sixteenth century the Finnish reformer Michael Agricola was able to compile two lists of gods from popular tradition. Pagan beliefs survived longest in the large and sparsely populated parishes of internal and eastern Finland. As late as the seventeenth century people in the wilds worshipped *Ukko*, one of the main pagan gods, and drank to him for a good harvest. Pagan elements are also clearly discernible in invocations and popular poetry recorded in the Modern Period.⁵⁹ Yet, the survival of palpable pagan elements in Finnish beliefs cannot be compared with the situation in the Baltic

56 Andræ, *Kyrka och frälse*, pp. 237–9.

57 Krag, *Vikingtid og rikssamling*, pp. 195–8; A. Nedkvitne, 'Ny tro, nye mentaliteter', in G. Dahlbäck (ed.), *Kyrka – samhälle – stat: Från kristnande till etablerad kyrka* (Historiallinen Arkisto, 110:3, Helsinki, 1997), pp. 102–3.

58 K. Hørby, *Velstands krise og tusind baghold* (Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie (n. 15), 5, København, 1989), p. 77; S. Bagge, *Mennesket i middelalderens Norge: Tanker, tro og holdninger 1000–1300* (Oslo, 1998), pp. 109–10.

59 Pirinen, *Medeltiden*, pp. 170–1, 177–84.

region which was christianised by brute force. There pagan burial custom and the cult of idols survived alongside Christianity in the seventeenth century and beyond.⁶⁰

The central elements of Christian conduct required in the Middle Ages were the performance of certain prescribed acts and the keeping of fixed rules, such as the observance of holidays, fasting, annual confession and holy communion. Such external forms of Christianity were established in Scandinavia as they were in the rest of western Christendom. That the doctrine of purgatory spread generally from the first half of the thirteenth century is evidenced by the increasing occurrence of requiem masses.⁶¹ The veneration of saints and pilgrimages also became central elements of medieval religious life in Scandinavia.

The cult of saints was introduced in a developed form through the veneration of the established saints of the western Church but soon acquired special characteristics that reflect the contacts of various Scandinavian regions with Christian Europe. It is not surprising that German saints were introduced in Denmark through the archiepiscopal see of Hamburg-Bremen, but that did not prevent English influence from becoming prominent in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; this influence was, however, even more conspicuous in Norway, and was also felt in Sweden. Veneration of French saints, too, reached Scandinavia.

Cults of native Scandinavian saints started in the eleventh century, though several of them were the work of foreign missionaries. Most famous was the Norwegian national saint Olaf Haraldsson whose cult started to develop shortly after his death in 1030. The other Scandinavian kingdoms also acquired their saintly kings (cf. Chapter 12(a)). The Dane Knud Svensen was canonised by the pope in 1100 or 1101 and enshrined in Odense. In Sweden Erik Jedvardsson, who was believed to have led the first legendary crusade to Finland, obtained saintly status in the latter half of the twelfth century and had his grave in Uppsala. Even in Iceland, Orkney and Finland there developed cults of 'national' saints: in Iceland Bishop Thórlákur Thórhallsson of Skálholt, enshrined in 1198; and in Orkney Earl Magnus Erlendsson, killed in 1115. In Finland Bishop Henrik, who was believed to have followed St Erik on his crusade, gradually obtained a corresponding status.

60 J. Kahk, 'Talurahva ideoloogia', in *Eesti talurahva ajalugu*, 1 (Tallinn, 1991), pp. 534–40; N. Vélius, 'The character of the sources of the Baltic religion and mythology', in N. Vélius (ed.), *Baltų religijos mitologijos šaltiniai – Sources of Baltic Religion and Mythology*, 1 (Vilnius, 1996), pp. 58, 61, 65.

61 Nedkvitne, 'Ny tro', pp. 104–5.

St Olaf's popularity made itself felt all over Scandinavia and even further away, with numerous churches being dedicated to him. In Swedish Medelpad this was the case with almost all churches, and 72 of the c. 330 medieval Icelandic churches had the same dedication, all of them built before 1200. St Olaf was widely venerated even in Finland where 17 per cent of the churches were consecrated to him and 46 per cent had various types of pictures of him; his name was also the most popular among medieval male Finns. However, the cult of St Olaf could also lead to national tensions. In Iceland the popularity of the Norwegian national saint was largely a phenomenon of the period before 1200 as shown by the church dedications; towards the end of the twelfth century there was an Icelandic reaction against the increasing influence of the archiepiscopal see of Trondheim with which St Olaf was associated. Bishop Þórlákur Þórhallsson was declared a saint by the *Althing* in 1198 and after that the cult of St Olaf declined in importance in Iceland.⁶²

In a European perspective the Scandinavian cult of saints had special characteristics. Among the Nordic saints there is a larger proportion of laymen and women than in other parts of Europe. Below (Chapter 14) it is also suggested that most Scandinavian saints were of the 'cold' northern type, less 'warm' and charismatic than the southern type; they often held high office, led stereotyped lives, and were venerated mainly for miracles after their death. At any rate the cult of saints became increasingly important in Scandinavia throughout the high and into the late Middle Ages, as reflected by the growing custom of dating according to saints' days.⁶³

Like the veneration of saints, pilgrimages were a developed part of western Christianity when introduced to Scandinavia, and Nordic pilgrims soon began to visit popular shrines and other places of pilgrimage abroad. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, princes and magnates were already going on armed pilgrimages to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and other people also travelled there. In the middle of the twelfth century the Icelandic abbot Nikólas Bergsson wrote an itinerary for the journey to the Holy Land. But Rome remained the most popular distant place of pilgrimage, though it should be noted that many pilgrims also had assignments at the curia. In the high Middle Ages Santiago de Compostela became the distant shrine visited by most Scandinavians after Rome, though Nordic pilgrims also went to places such as Bari, Cologne,

62 Ó. Ásgeirsson, 'Olav den helige på Island', in Rumar (ed.), *Helgonet i Nidaros*, pp. 84, 89–90; J. Knuutila, 'Sankt Olav i Finlands kyrkliga konst under medeltiden', *ibid.*, p. 116.

63 A. Vauchez, *La Sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Age d'après le procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques* (Rome, 1980), pp. 121–9, 154–62; A. Fröjmark and C. Krötzel, 'Den tidiga helgonkulten', in Dahlbäck (ed.), *Kyrka – samhälle – stat*, pp. 137; Nedkvitne, 'Ny tro', p. 116.

Aachen and Rocamadour. These long-distance pilgrimages were expensive and mostly undertaken by people of the upper social strata. It was not until the fourteenth century, when foreign places of pilgrimage such as Wilsnack in Brandenburg emerged in northern Germany, that ordinary people – burghers, craftsmen and even peasants – began going on pilgrimages abroad in significant numbers. Women were among the early Scandinavian pilgrims, which was unique in Europe.⁶⁴

In contrast with foreign shrines, native and other Scandinavian places of pilgrimage had long been visited by ordinary people. By far the most popular Nordic shrine was that of St Olaf in Nidaros, which also attracted many pilgrims from outside Scandinavia.

However, the fact that the external forms of Christianity soon took root in Scandinavia does not cast much light on people's 'real' beliefs. In earlier research there was a tendency to doubt the genuineness of medieval Christianity among the Nordic peoples, but nowadays scholars more readily accept that Christian teaching was able to change the religious attitudes of the Scandinavians. The growing emphasis in high medieval preaching on the individual's responsibility for his or her own salvation may also have helped to weaken the grip of kin and other social bonds on the individual.⁶⁵

Nevertheless there appear to have been differences between European and Scandinavian religious mentalities in the high Middle Ages. From the twelfth century in west and central Europe the broader population was susceptible to criticism directed against ecclesiastical abuses and the wealth of the Church and to preaching that advocated a return to the apostolic ideal of poverty. Such thoughts were spread by ambulant preachers who did not always subject themselves to the ecclesiastical hierarchy and whose success reveals a deeply felt personal religion but also widespread societal dissatisfaction nourished by the economic and social problems caused by the growth of population. The ground was thus prepared for the spread of heterodox and heretical ideas. Along the southern shores of the Baltic and elsewhere in northern continental Europe the Waldensians and the heretics of the Free Spirit had a great impact in the later phase of the high Middle Ages, and flagellants made themselves felt in the same regions after the Black Death.

Such movements, however, did not spread to Scandinavia and the east Baltic region, despite the close Nordic contacts with regions where heresies were

64 C. Krötzel, *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag: Formen des Verhaltens im skandinavischen Mittelalter* (Studia Historica, 46, Helsinki, 1994), pp. 102–18, 354–6.

65 Nedkvitne, 'Ny tro', pp. 112–17; Bagge, *Mennesket*, pp. 109–10.

widespread. The situation in these northern lands resembled the conditions in the British Isles where flagellants, and later heretics, were not prominent until the fourteenth century. There appears to have been little susceptibility among the Nordic peoples to preaching that invoked a deeper personal religious engagement. As the conversion came late in Scandinavia it may well be that the Christianity of the broader population remained more primitive than in regions that had been christianised long ago. This is indicated by a popular cult of saints that did not correspond with the new religious ideals of the high Middle Ages.⁶⁶ The fact that the popular high and late medieval revolts in Scandinavia lacked religious elements (see Chapter 19) points in the same direction, and heresies did not even gain ground in the late Middle Ages (see Chapter 22).

Whatever the religious impact of Christianity in Scandinavia there is little doubt that it brought with it a new conception of responsibility for the poor and needy in society. This was a responsibility that had earlier rested on kin; moreover, slave owners had certain, very limited responsibilities following a slave's release as reflected by a provision in the Norwegian provincial laws. After the conversion the local community was expected, to some extent, to provide for needy people but the main responsibility still lay with the family. In certain respects the care of the needy assumed different characteristics in the various Scandinavian countries, and there were also differences between urban and rural situations.

As elsewhere in western Christendom the Church in Scandinavia played a central role in the care of the poor and infirm. Almsgiving was an important element in Christian devotional life and brought resources that enabled the Church to engage in charitable work. In Denmark poor relief was the exclusive responsibility of various ecclesiastical institutions, such as monasteries, altar foundations and guilds, while in the rest of Scandinavia the peasants were to a larger extent legally obliged to contribute. The peasants of the Swedish kingdom and Norway were thus required to take care of poor people for a number of days and then move them on to the next farm. In Iceland it was the task of the local secular community, *hreppr*, to provide for needy people if their families were not able to do so. There were also special and autonomous charitable foundations in Iceland caring for poor people whose resources were called *kristfjá*.

66 E. Orrman, 'Harhaopit keskiajan murrosten heijastumina', in T. Tuhkanen et al. (eds.), *Keskusteluja professorin kanssa. Veikko Litzen 60 vuotta 1.12. 1993* (Turun yliopisto. Historian laitoksen julkaisuja, 28, Åbo, 1993), pp. 152, 159–61; Bagge, *Mennesket*, pp. 144–6.

Beggars were not popular, and there were attempts to distinguish between those who really needed help and those who subsisted on begging. The Icelandic legislation was particularly severe on beggars: it was a punishable offense to provide illegal beggars with food, and according to older provisions it was even permitted to castrate them. In Bergen and other Norwegian towns the Townlaw of 1276 sought in various ways to limit the number of beggars. Care of the urban poor and sick in Scandinavia (as elsewhere in Europe) was left mainly to altar foundations and guilds whose activities were based on voluntary generosity and sometimes also on obligatory contributions from possessors of urban property.⁶⁷ In Bergen and other Norwegian towns there was a system of poor relief corresponding to that found in rural society by which poor people were moved from tenement to tenement.⁶⁸

Particular institutions for the care of the poor and infirm were, with the exception of the services rendered by rural monasteries, generally situated in the towns. In Denmark and Sweden it was the task of the urban houses of the Holy Spirit, which appeared from the early thirteenth century, to take care of such people for life, but they also received well-to-do older people who made substantial payments on entering, as did monasteries, cathedral chapters and episcopal households too. In Denmark there were some thirty medieval houses of the Holy Spirit, and they were also established in most of the larger Swedish towns.

Correspondingly, hospitals for the care of poor people, particularly those who were also infirm, were established by the Church in the more important Norwegian towns in the high Middle Ages, partly in cooperation with the monarchy. Urban hospitals for sick people had particular responsibilities for lepers. Such hospitals are known from the late thirteenth century but were often older; in the late Middle Ages they were generally dedicated to St George. In Norway there were some twenty medieval hospitals for the poor and sick, among them a number of leprosy hospitals. In the Danish kingdom there were about forty leprosy hospitals and in Sweden two or three in each diocese. The houses of the Holy Spirit and the hospitals were generally small institutions with no more than a few dozen inhabitants.⁶⁹

In addition to its religious function and the social tasks it undertook the Church also played a very important cultural role in medieval Scandinavia. Its

67 K. Pirinen, 'Fattigvård', *KLNM*, 4 (1959), cols. 202–8.

68 K. Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad (Bergen bys historie*, 1, Bergen, 1982), pp. 460–1.

69 E. Skov et al., 'Helligåndshus', *KLNM*, 6 (1961), cols. 407–10; V. Møller-Christensen et al., 'Hospital', *KLNM*, 4 (1959), cols. 677–93.

teaching was the only form of popular education. Virtually all formal education took place in ecclesiastical institutions such as monastic and cathedral schools. It was also primarily the clergy who sought higher education in Europe, first at leading cathedral and monastic schools and later at the universities that appeared from the second half of the twelfth century. The earliest known Scandinavian student abroad was the first native Icelandic bishop who studied in Herford in Westphalia in the 1020s, as did also his son and successor. In the twelfth century most Scandinavian students were attracted to Paris, where Danes and Norwegians visited the Parisian monastery of St Victor, the Norwegians particularly after cathedral chapters began to be established in the mid-twelfth century. Later the university of Paris became the main foreign centre of study for Scandinavians until the mid-fourteenth century. There is evidence for several Danes and Norwegians and a few Swedes studying there already in the first part of the thirteenth century. Swedish students became more numerous from the mid-thirteenth century when cathedral chapters started to emerge in the Swedish church province. Conversely, the studies of Icelanders in Paris and at other foreign centres of learning decreased after Norwegian bishops began to be appointed to the Icelandic sees and the Icelanders submitted to the Norwegian crown. The study of Roman and Canon Law in Bologna also attracted several Danes, Norwegians and Swedes until about 1300, including some secular magnates.

The evidence for Scandinavian students abroad in the high Middle Ages is very fragmentary but there were all the time a considerable number at the university of Paris; in 1309 thirty Swedish students are mentioned there. After the middle of the fourteenth century the foreign studies of Scandinavians changed direction, with many students being attracted to German universities and, in the fifteenth century, particularly to the urban universities on the southern shores of the Baltic. In the years 1367–1536 there is evidence for at least some 3,400 Scandinavian students at various European universities (at least 2,000 Danes, more than 800 Swedes, 220 Norwegians and 160 Finns, but only four Icelanders). Not until the late fifteenth century were the first Scandinavian universities founded, in Uppsala (1477) and København (1479).⁷⁰

Through its wide-ranging contacts with Europe the Church was the main force behind the extensive cultural Europeanisation of Scandinavia in the high

70 See the contributions from the various Scandinavian countries in M. Jokipii and I. Nummela (eds.), *Urnordisk kulturhistoria: Universitetsbesöken i utlandet före 1660* (*Studia Historica Jyväskyläensia*, 22:1, Jyväskylä, 1981).

Middle Ages, a process that involved not only the establishment of the external forms of Christianity and the dissemination of its creed but also such developments as more advanced administrative and governmental techniques, new tendencies in legislation and political ideology, the introduction of new concepts and institutions of social care, and the general raising of the educational level. It was also the Church that became the focus of most high medieval art, literature and intellectual life and funded the activities in those spheres (cf. Chapters 15 and 16).

PART V

*

HIGH AND LATE MEDIEVAL
CULTURE

Ideologies and mentalities

SVERRE BAGGE

The history of mentality deals with a great variety of topics; ultimately, it is a way of regarding history rather than a particular discipline. For this reason, a short survey like the present chapter has to be fairly selective, the more so as this approach to history – with some exceptions¹ – has been introduced fairly recently to Scandinavia and has not resulted in many empirical studies. This treatment of mentality will be linked to the two great organisations that were built up in Scandinavia in the high Middle Ages: the monarchy and the Church. In this way, it will also be possible to treat mentality in close connection with ideology, i.e. to discuss changes in the implicit aspect of thought and behaviour as well as doctrines and constitutional principles.

The old society and the new: a royalist programme of the thirteenth century

A main theme in most surveys of the Scandinavian countries until around 1300 is the growth of the state (cf. Chapter 12). The mental aspect of this development is illustrated particularly clearly in *The King's Mirror*, a Norwegian work from the mid-thirteenth century, formed as a dialogue between a father and a son.² To its author the king is first and foremost a judge, a picture which accords well with the above-mentioned development of royal justice in Norway at the time. As God's representative on earth, he should represent an impersonal justice above the parties and judge them according to their merits, taking into account not only the external facts of the case but also its circumstances, the intentions of the criminal, as well as his or her whole personality. Peaceful and God-fearing people should be treated leniently even if their crimes are serious

1 The most important is probably V. Grønbech, *Vor folkeæt i oldtiden*, 1–4 (København, 1909–12); reprinted 1955.

2 For this and the following, see S. Bagge, *The Political Thought of the King's Mirror* (Odense, 1987).

in themselves, while those who are evil should be treated severely. By contrast, the traditional system of justice is characterised in the so-called 'allegory of dearth' in which a divided kingdom is compared to a country suffering from dearth or famine. One of the consequences of such a condition is that royal justice is not respected, that people settle their matters themselves, and that they take revenge on innocent men and seek compensation for men who have been killed because of their crimes.

In his emphasis on intentions the author is in accordance with the new trends in moral theology as well as criminal law as developed from the twelfth century, mainly by canonists and theologians. The changes in this field have often been regarded as a kind of mental revolution.³ This is probably an exaggeration. The Icelandic sagas show that the distinction between intentional and involuntary action was not unknown, but that it could only with difficulty be made legally relevant as long as there was no superior authority above the parties. Honour demanded that an offence be normally treated as intentional unless the offender himself claimed that it was accidental. Such a confession might, however, be regarded as humiliating and might therefore not be made even if the offence was actually unintentional.⁴ The main change in this field was therefore institutional: the emergence of an authority above the parties. This institutional change might in turn lead to a greater emphasis on the distinction between intentional and accidental actions, as we have seen was the case in the Norwegian law-codes of King Magnus Law-mender from the 1270s.

The conflict between the old and the new attitude to a central authority emerges clearly from the following passage of *The King's Mirror*:

[The Son:] What profit can such men as have an abundance of wealth and kinsmen find in the king's service and in binding themselves to his service with the housecarl name as their only title? . . . [The Father:] I should say that you have not inquired very wisely into this matter . . . There are many reasons, . . . why men would rather be kingsmen than be called by the peasant's name only. The first reply must be that the king owns the entire kingdom . . . so that all the men who are in his kingdom owe him service whenever his needs demand it . . . Now, since all the men of the realm are thus bound to the royal service, why should not every sensible man regard it a greater advantage to be in

3 C. Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual* (Toronto, 1987), pp. 70–5; C. Radding, *A World Made by Men* (Chapel Hill, 1985), pp. 210–13.

4 W. I. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking* (Chicago, 1990), pp. 61–8. Admittedly, the sagas were written down in the thirteenth century, but their representation of conflicts is so different from the new system, introduced by Crown and Church, that they are unlikely to have been influenced by Canon Law on this point.

the king's full protection and friendship, . . . than to be a mere cotter who is constantly under the control of others, though he still owes the same duties as otherwise?⁵

This is the only place in *The King's Mirror* where the Father blames the Son for asking a stupid question, a fact showing the importance of the doctrine brought forward in this passage as well as its novelty to the contemporary audience. The authoritarian doctrine of the king's exalted position and the total loyalty and obedience his subjects owe him is developed further in the third part of the work, which depicts the king as God's representative on earth. The king holds his office from God which gives him power over the life and death of all his subjects and makes disobedience to him equivalent to disobedience to God.

By contrast, the Son's scepticism towards all this royal glory can be further illustrated by the picture of kingship in the Icelandic kings' sagas of the first half of the thirteenth century. Here the relationship between the king and the members of the aristocracy is understood in terms of personal friendship, not in terms of loyalty and subordination to the head of state.⁶ To be under another man's command and serve without a gift in return was humiliating. Consequently, honourable behaviour was not to show unconditional loyalty to one's superior, including the king, but to show one's independence by ending the relationship if one was not treated well enough. People were wary of entering into any kind of relationship that might indicate full submission, such as to swear an oath to somebody, except under very special circumstances. The king had to attract 'friends' through his personality and behaviour in order to rule. The sagas therefore give fairly detailed descriptions of their appearance and character as observed by others. The most important qualities were those necessary to lead people and above all to win conflicts – qualities such as intelligence, bravery or eloquence. Generally, deeds or results were more important than character itself. As in an American election campaign 'nothing succeeds like success'. Through generosity and a charismatic personality, the king or magnate attracts friends, which enables him to have political

5 L. M. Larson (trans.), *The King's Mirror* (New York, 1917), p. 174; L. Holm-Olsen (ed.), *Konungs skuggsiá* (Oslo, 1945), p. 42.

6 For the following, see S. Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley, 1991), pp. 129–45; S. Bagge, *From Gang Leader to Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996), pp. 20–2, 80–2. For the system in Iceland, which was similar, see J. V. Sigurðsson, 'Friendship in the Icelandic Commonwealth', in G. Pálsson (ed.), *From Sagas to Society* (London, 1992), pp. 205–15; J. V. Sigurðsson, 'Forholdet mellom frender, hushold og venner på Island i fristatstiden', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 74 (1995), pp. 311–30; J. V. Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth* (Odense, 1999).

and military success and defeat his enemies, which in turn gains him more friends.

As pointed out by the author of *The King's Mirror* as well as by several modern historians this system easily leads to conflicts and violence. The mental and ideological aspect of this state of affairs has sometimes been understood in terms of Norbert Elias' idea of a spontaneous medieval personality which is gradually 'tamed' through the emergence of a strong state.⁷ It seems, however, that honour is a more important concept in understanding this society than spontaneity. Even the quarrels during drinking parties, which seem to have been the main reason why people killed each other in Norway in the later Middle Ages and which are also described in the sagas, involve honour.⁸ Drinking parties were not simply occasions for people to live out their spontaneous emotions; they were competitive gatherings of men where honour was at stake. Men's previous actions were discussed and evaluated and the participants had to show their wit and verbal skills. An insult on such an occasion was a serious matter which demanded a strong reaction.

On the other hand, the importance of honour should not prevent us from regarding contemporary conflicts in terms of interests. Admittedly, the sagas often describe such conflicts as the result of accidental clashes which lead to someone being killed, which in turn makes his relatives bound by honour to take revenge. As an alternative to this the offended party might accept a compensation, although there are hints in the sources that this was considered less honourable. The final decision in such matters, however, was often the result of strategic considerations. Strategic interests might also determine the outbreak of conflicts in the first place.

Thus, there is little to indicate that the prolonged conflicts between various pretenders or chieftains and their factions, like the so-called Civil Wars in Norway (1130–1240) or the internal struggles in Iceland in the thirteenth century (see Chapter 12(c)), were essentially feuds in which the participants sought revenge for relatives, although this motive does occur in some cases. Basically, these struggles seem to have concerned wealth and power and been conducted between individuals or factions based on mutual friendship and interests. But it is interesting that to some extent they borrowed the vocabulary and the procedure of the feud, accidental clashes often serving as pretexts for starting a conflict. 'Political' man in the sagas thus seems to have been as 'rational' and calculating as a modern politician, but he lacked the attachment to permanent

7 N. Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, 1–2 (Frankfurt, 1977).

8 J. Sandnes, *Kniven, ølet og æren: Kriminalitet i Norge på 1500- og 1600-tallet* (Oslo, 1990).

parties and ideologies which makes the modern politician distinct from the private individual. In this 'game of politics' honour is still important as one of the prizes for the successful politician. There is thus no opposition between promoting one's interests and gaining honour.

Monarchy and aristocracy

In its main outlines the Christian idea of the king holding office by the grace of God was introduced in Scandinavia fairly soon after the conversion to Christianity, but it took considerable time to affect the relationship between the king and the people. An important symbolic expression of the new ideology was royal unction and coronation which we have seen were first introduced in Norway in 1163–4, then in Denmark in 1170, and finally in Sweden, probably in 1210. In the course of the thirteenth century this ceremony became established custom in all three countries. From the mid-thirteenth century not only the king but also the queen was crowned and the dynasty as a whole received a new importance, the difference between the king and the aristocracy becoming more strongly underlined. Thus, the king only married members of other royal families and even other members of the dynasty stopped marrying non-royal partners. The cult of the royal saints, St Olaf in Norway (d. 1030), St Knud in Denmark (d. 1086), and St Erik in Sweden (d. c. 1160), can be regarded in the same perspective.

A new 'European style' monarchy was developed earlier in Denmark than in Norway. We have seen that the Christian-European ideal of the *rex iustus* is expressed already in the early twelfth-century hagiography of St Knud. The Valdemarian Age (1170–1241) saw a strong monarchy in close cooperation with the Church and a new feudal, military aristocracy in the king's service. The Valdemarian ideology of the *rex iustus*, holding his office through God and ruling on his behalf, is clearly expressed in the arengas of the royal diplomas of this period which in contrast to the contemporary and later Norwegian ones were mostly written in Latin.⁹ The greatest historiographical work of the period – indeed one of the greatest of the Middle Ages as a whole – Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, clearly belongs to the Latin and European culture of the age. We have seen that it was written under the patronage of Archbishop Absalon, one of the leading figures in the contemporary royal government. Nevertheless, its picture of the ideal king differs considerably from the ideology of the arengas in stressing more secular virtues, such as

9 N. Damsholt, 'Kingship in Danish royal diplomas', *Medieval Scandinavia*, 3 (1970), pp. 66–108.

bravery and skill in war and strength and efficiency in maintaining the interests of the country (*patria*) and putting down internal opposition.

Saxo's ideology has been the subject of very different interpretations. A recent interpretation¹⁰ regards Saxo as a supporter of the Valdemarian monarchy and its new aristocracy in the king's service (*herremænd*) against the old magnates. To some extent, his different attitude to that of the arengas may be due to genre; the administration of justice and internal government is usually not very prominent in historiography, although there are contemporary examples of historical works being deeply influenced by the Christian ideal of the *rex iustus*. Whatever the exact relationship between Saxo's ideology and contemporary monarchy he can hardly, despite some similarity with the sagas, be regarded as the spokesman of some traditional, pre-royalist ideology. Thus, Danish written sources do not give the same impression of radical change and conflicts between the new monarchy and earlier ideas of friendship and patronage; the change seems to have taken place earlier and possibly more gradually. As for Sweden, the early sources are too meagre to allow us to trace these changes in any detail.

The actual change in people's attitudes was probably less dramatic than official sources such as *The King's Mirror* want us to believe. Generally, the sources representing the new ideas are both more explicit and systematic and have been better preserved than those expressing the old ones. Nevertheless, as far as can be known from the rather meagre source material, the king of Norway managed to bring an end to prolonged feuds between families in accordance with the provisions of the national Landlaw of 1274. On the other hand, the king took a lenient attitude to offenders against these provisions, allowing them to buy their peace through paying heavy fines (cf. Chapter 12(c)). The later Middle Ages therefore seem, in Norway at least, to represent a transitional phase. The state now intervened in the conflicts between people and prevented them from developing into feuds, but there still existed an honour-based society demanding strong and often violent reactions to insults.

10 S. Kværndrup, 'Det politiske niveau i Gesta Danorum', in *Dansk litteraturhistorie*, 1 (København, 1990), pp. 305–42. Kværndrup regards him as a supporter of the Valdemarian monarchy and its new aristocracy in the king's service (*herremænd*). According to B. Sawyer's interpretation, his main attachment was to the Church and Archbishop Absalon. See B. Sawyer, 'Valdemar, Absalon, and Saxo: Historiography and politics in medieval Denmark', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 63 (1985), 685–705. See also L. Hermansson, *Släkt, vänner och makt: en studie av elitens politiska kultur i 1100-talets Danmark* (Göteborg, 2000), pp. 190–209. Otherwise, recent research has largely focused on Saxo's European learning and his theological and typological understanding of history. See K. Johannesson, *Saxo Grammaticus: Komposition och världsbild i Gesta Danorum* (Stockholm, 1978); I. Skovgaard Petersen, *Da Tidernes Herre var nær: Studier i Saxos historiesyn* (København, 1987).

By contrast, the Danish king, despite several efforts, was unable to ban feuds and private revenge because of the opposition of the strong aristocracy of the country.¹¹ The sources give evidence of a number of feuds in Denmark in the later Middle Ages, particularly among the nobility. The king often tried to mediate between the parties and to regulate the conduct of the feud but he had no power to prevent it. Extant letters of reconciliation between feuding nobles (*orfejde*) show the same ideas of honour and pride that we meet in early Icelandic and Norwegian sources. The party who accepts compensation for a dead relative is afraid of being thought of as less honourable than if he had taken revenge, and makes the killer swear that he would have accepted compensation on the same conditions.¹² Nor could the king or royal officials feel safe against attempts at revenge for actions taken in an official capacity. Consequently, the king also had his opponents issue letters of reconciliation.

There has been no extensive examination of 'the rules of the game' in late medieval politics, nor of the relationship between official ideology and social practice. However, Lars Bisgaard has studied addresses and formulas in the correspondence between the king of Denmark and members of the aristocracy in his service in the period c. 1450–1536.¹³ The latter clearly emphasise the distance between the king and themselves when addressing him. The king is 'the most noble lord and mighty prince' and the noble addressing him is his servant who owes him 'humble, subservient, dutiful, and faithful service'. The king addresses the members of the nobility, like all other subjects, condescendingly as 'most dear to Us'. The king also normally addresses nobles in the singular, except for men who are particularly prominent or close to him, who are addressed in the plural. Such men are also addressed by other phrases showing the king's particular favour. On the other hand, when ordering his men, the king normally uses the term 'ask', although clearly implying that it is their duty to perform his 'request'. Most probably, this way of expression should be understood in light of the picture of the exalted, gracious lord who is so confident of the loyalty of his men that he finds it unnecessary to address them in the form of explicit orders.

This terminology corresponds almost perfectly to the relationship between the king and his men as depicted in *The King's Mirror*. The difference, however, is that these men were not simply subjects; they had entered the king's service

11 O. Fenger, *Fejde og mandebød: Studier over slægtsansvaret i germansk og gammeldansk ret* (København, 1971), pp. 441–505; T. Dahlerup, *De fire stænder*, in O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, 6 (København, 1989), pp. 270–8.

12 Fenger, *Fejde*, pp. 497–504.

13 L. Bisgaard, *Tjenesteideal og fromhedsideal: Studier i adelens tænkemåde i dansk senmiddelalder* (Århus, 1988), pp. 27–36.

voluntarily and were still able to leave it. The sources of the later Middle Ages give examples of nobles who formally renounce their loyalty to the king. The formality of this act may indicate that it is considered a more drastic step than in the earlier Middle Ages. Moreover, all known examples of such behaviour date from periods of crisis or rebellion when the noble in question can justify his behaviour either by the fact that it has proved impossible to serve the king any longer or by some joint aristocratic resistance to the king, in accordance with the normal paragraph of lawful resistance in the late medieval election charters (*håndfæstninger*).

In this way, the late medieval Danish correspondence between the king and the nobles shows a mixture of the new Christian ideology of the king as head of state and God's representative on earth, to whom his subjects owe loyal service, and the traditional or feudal ideas of a contract between the king and the individual noble. To some extent, these opposing ideas can be reconciled through the doctrine of limited monarchy or *regimen politicum*, dominating in the election charters.

Some of the thirteenth-century Norwegian sources, particularly *The King's Mirror*, seem to have a strong ring of absolutism. However, they do not really treat the question of division of power within society. The author of *The King's Mirror* regards the aristocracy and the royal counsellors as aiding the king in governing the country, apparently without envisaging any conflict within this circle. This may be a specifically Norwegian attitude; we have seen that the relationship between the king and the aristocracy generally was fairly harmonious in this kingdom after the Civil Wars. But it is also characteristic of the early stage in the development of centralised monarchy. No doubt, there were power struggles during this phase but an organised, aristocratic opposition against the king was hardly formed until the late thirteenth century. From this period onwards, Danish and Swedish sources give evidence of the opposition between *dominium regale* and *regimen politicum* current in political thought in the rest of contemporary Europe (cf. Chapter 24 and Conclusion).¹⁴

The former point of view is clearly expressed in the Swedish *Um styrilse konunga ok höfðinga* from the first half of the fourteenth century, possibly the 1340s, which is an adaptation of Aegidius Romanus' *De regimine principum* (cf. Chapter 12(d)). The latter is stated less explicitly but forms the basis of the aristocratic programme of elective monarchy which is expressed particularly clearly in

¹⁴ E. Lönnroth, *Sverige och Kalmarunionen* (Göteborg, 1934); A. E. Christensen, *Kongemagt og aristokrati: Epoker i dansk middelalderlig statsopfattelse indtil unionstiden* (København, 1945), pp. 71–101, 179–242.

the *håndfæstning* issued by the king after negotiations with the council. We have seen that such charters became a permanent custom in Denmark in the late Middle Ages, and they were introduced in the two other Scandinavian kingdoms as well. In Sweden an aristocratic political programme was formulated in the Charter of Liberties from 1319 (see Chapter 12(d)). This programme was further developed into a kind of national ideology, mainly expressed in historical writings, during the struggles with the Danish kings in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.¹⁵

Thus, the introduction of the European-Christian model of monarchy did not necessarily mean that the king strengthened his power in relationship to the social élite as a whole. These ideas could also form the foundation of a corporate understanding of political power which could be used by the aristocracy and the Church to limit the king's personal power and even to strengthen the local power of individual aristocrats. Although the relationship between the king and the aristocracy changed far less than sources like *The King's Mirror* will have us believe, late medieval political behaviour took place within an ideological framework emphasising the particular 'public' character of the royal office and the loyalty and obedience the king was entitled to under normal circumstances.

The courtly culture

Whether or not the new ideas of monarchy and social hierarchy led to a stronger royal power they certainly created a stronger distinction between the king and his men on the one hand and the rest of the population on the other.

To Norbert Elias the victory of the state produced far-reaching changes in culture, manners and behaviour. An important medium for these changes was the formation of a courtly culture. *The King's Mirror* and other products of thirteenth-century courtly culture in Norway may present some similarity to this development, although these sources give no evidence of any change in the intimate and unreflected aspects of human behaviour, such as attitudes to food and drink, sleep, sexuality, nakedness and bodily functions, which Elias and more recently Muchembled have analysed.¹⁶ But *The King's Mirror* contains

15 Lönnroth, *Sverige*, pp. 329–41; H. Schück, 'Chronicles: Sweden', in P. Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1993), pp. 81–2; O. L. Larsson, *Kalmarunionens tid: Från drottning Margareta till Kristian II* (Stockholm, 1997).

16 Elias, *Über den Prozess*; R. Muchembled, *L'invention de l'homme moderne* (Paris, 1988).

considerable information on courtly etiquette, including a whole programme for improving the manners and behaviour at court.

The main aim of these rules is twofold: to express respect and obedience to the king and to show the exclusive character of the aristocracy in the king's service. When, for instance, the Father was asked why one should take one's coat off when approaching the king, he explains that doing this is a way of showing that one is willing to serve. Further, he points out that it does not matter that most people will find such behaviour ridiculous: manners among great and noble men are often very different from those among ordinary people.¹⁷ Similarly, the numerous rules on dress, hair, beard, and so forth are intended to emphasise the exclusiveness of the king's men. The importance of such matters is further demonstrated by a later source. In an ordinance from 1308, issued in a moment of crisis and intended to secure the king full control over his men, King Håkon V strictly forbids anyone to introduce new fashions in dress into the kingdom, threatening his own men who do this with loss of their aristocratic rank and his own friendship.¹⁸ It is an important royal prerogative to be the trendsetter in such matters and the king's men show their loyalty by conforming to his example.

The King's Mirror gives a glimpse of how these rules were explicitly formulated and transmitted to the members of the court. The chivalrous literature which was introduced during the same period may serve as a collection of examples of such behaviour.¹⁹ This is explicitly mentioned in some of the prefaces, e.g. that of *Strengleikar*, a translation of the *Lais* of Marie de France. Here the translator points to the importance of reading the stories of the past so as to learn virtues and the fear of God from them, adding that his translation was made on King Håkon's initiative.²⁰ Considering the actual contents of the collection one is not quite convinced of this noble purpose, as the stories celebrate illicit love and sensual pleasure. Generally, one may doubt to what extent this literature was introduced because its contents were considered suitable and to what extent it was attractive simply by being foreign. The latter assumption

17 Holm-Olsen (ed.), *Konungs skuggsið*, p. 47; Larson (trans.), *The King's Mirror*, pp. 184–6.

18 C. R. Unger and H. J. Huitfeldt (eds.), *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, II, no. 6, p. 15. On the importance of dress, see H. Monclair, *Forestillinger om kongen i norsk middealder gjennom ritualene og symbolene rundt ham* (Norges forskningsråd: KULTs skrifserie, 44, Oslo, 1995), pp. 68–88.

19 On the chivalric literature and the court milieu in Norway at the time, see R. Meissner, *Die Strengleikar* (Halle, 1902); E. F. Halvorsen, *The Norse version of the Chanson de Roland* (*Bibliotheca Arnemagnæana*, 19, København, 1959); M. Kalinke, 'Norse romances', in C. Clover and J. Lindow (eds.), *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 316–63. See also Chapter 15.

20 R. Keyser and C. R. Unger (eds.), *Strengleikar* (Christiania, 1850), pp. 1–2.

corresponds to Gellner's theory of élite formation through increasing separation from the ordinary population of the country and increasing similarity to élites in other countries.²¹

The Norwegian courtly culture was concerned with the relationship between the aristocracy and the king while less attention was paid to extravagance and generosity towards fellow aristocrats and chivalrous behaviour towards women. When transferred to Sweden, the link to the monarchy grows weaker and the specifically aristocratic character of this literature stronger. The main example of this is *Erikskrönikan*, the above-mentioned chronicle of the Swedish Duke Erik, probably written around 1320.²² The chronicle depicts Erik as a chivalrous hero, generous to his men, handsome in manners and appearance, and equally prominent in war, political negotiations and festivities. During the Christmas celebrations in Oslo in 1302, after his engagement to the daughter of King Håkon V, he completely charms his future mother-in-law, Queen Eufemia.

However, the chronicle does not attempt to conceal the fact that Erik was also an astute and cynical politician who acted in the way that best served his own personal interests. The chronicle is clearly biased in favour of Erik and his brother, while King Birger and particularly his wife, Queen Margrethe, are described as bad characters. But it does not represent Erik as the champion of an aristocratic programme of *regimen politicum*; the chronicle celebrates courtly and aristocratic virtues without really discussing the opposing political programmes of the time. It focuses almost exclusively on the aristocracy, paying little attention to the common people and showing little concern for their suffering as a consequence of the wars between the great men. It is thus evidence of a fairly exclusive aristocratic culture and of an understanding of politics as a game between the members of a small élite. The ballads introduced in Scandinavia from the late thirteenth century, directly or indirectly inspired from France, form a further example of the new courtly culture.²³ The courtly culture is also expressed in Danish wallpaintings of the fourteenth century.²⁴

21 E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 8–13.

22 Schück, 'Chronicles'; S. B. Jansson, 'Chronicles, Rhymed', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, pp. 83–4; T. E. Fagerland, 'Arme riddere og halte helter: Erikskrönikans politiske mentalitet' (unpublished thesis, University of Bergen, 1994). See also chapters 12(d) and 15.

23 Kværndrup, 'Folkevisen', in *Dansk litteraturhistorie*, 1; B. Jonsson, 'The ballad and oral literature', *Harvard English Studies*, 17 (1991), pp. 139–70.

24 S. Kaspersen, 'Kalkmaleri og samfund 1241–1340/50', in B. P. McGuire (ed.), *Kulturlblomstring og samfundskrise i 1300-tallet* (København, 1979), pp. 108–65.

By and large, the development of a specifically aristocratic culture confirms the impression of a change in social structure as well as mentality in connection with the development of the monarchy. As in the case of rules of loyalty and political thought we may distinguish between a monarchic and a more specifically aristocratic variety of this culture, the former dominating in Norway and in the early period, the latter in Denmark and Sweden and in the later period. This specifically aristocratic culture represents a considerable continuity with the honour-based society we meet in the saga literature, although it differs in its emphasis on the exclusive character of the aristocracy and in recognising monarchy as an institution. It also has a largely secular character, which raises the question of the relationship between the monarchy and the other great power in medieval society, the Church.

The importance of Christianity

The introduction of Christianity led to a similar kind of élite formation as the establishment of a centralised monarchy, a distinction between a wealthy and learned higher clergy in close contact with the rest of Europe and the great majority of illiterates, with the lower clergy and parts of the secular aristocracy in an intermediate position. Most of the literature and the visual arts preserved from medieval Scandinavia is, to a greater or lesser extent, the product of the ecclesiastical culture.

Nevertheless, there are some important geographical and chronological divisions. Didactic and devotional literature, mainly sermons and legends of the saints, has been preserved from the whole region, in Latin as well as in the vernacular. However, Denmark and from the late thirteenth century Sweden, too, seem to have been more integrated in the ecclesiastical élite culture than Norway and Iceland. Denmark has a continuous tradition of ecclesiastical literature in Latin going back to the early twelfth century. From the thirteenth century there is evidence of scholastic learning from Denmark as well as Sweden, and even original contributions by natives of these countries. In contrast, the vernacular literature developed in Norway and Iceland, particularly in the thirteenth century, was based more on indigenous traditions and practical experience and less influenced by ecclesiastical culture. This difference is also confirmed by the evidence of university studies where Danes and Swedes form the majority from the early fourteenth century.²⁵

25 S. Bagge, 'Nordic students at foreign universities', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 9 (1984), pp. 5–13.

This is all in keeping with the accepted picture of a stronger élite formation in Denmark and Sweden than in Norway, as well as the leading role played by these countries in the later Middle Ages. It does not, however, allow us to draw any comparative conclusions regarding popular religion.

There has been some discussion among Scandinavian scholars, particularly Norwegian ones, on whether the Scandinavians 'really' became Christian in the Middle Ages. The opinion that they did not has been fairly widespread, particularly in the older literature. This probably has to do with the romantic notion of an original Germanic culture with its centre in Scandinavia which to some extent was able to resist the ecstatic, superstitious and 'unhealthy' aspects of European Catholicism: the belief in miracles, extreme asceticism and the rejection of sexuality and the body, and the unquestioned acceptance of ecclesiastical authority. In this respect, romanticism was reinforced by Protestantism; without directly favouring paganism Protestants could approve of some 'healthy' resistance to the more questionable aspects of Catholicism.

A discussion along these lines has become more complicated recently. First, a reasonable criterion for the degree to which Christianity was adopted in a given region would be the degree to which it conforms to European Christianity as a whole. In recent years, however, there has been a lively debate about this question which has made the European 'yardstick' far less exact than before.²⁶ Secondly, the way the question is posed has been attacked, i.e. the idea of Christianity as a more or less permanent entity which to a greater or lesser degree penetrates various countries and layers of society. Criticism has also been directed at the distinction between élite and popular religion. Instead, scholars have focused on the role of religion in particular social contexts and the interaction between the clerical élite and other groups in the development of cults and beliefs.²⁷

There has been no extensive research in Scandinavia along these lines but there is clearly a growing interest in religion as well as in mentality in general. As for the 'traditional' question of the penetration of Christianity the similarity between Scandinavia and the rest of Europe immediately seems to be greater than the difference. The ecclesiastical organisation was well developed, and, with the exception of Iceland in the Free State period (until 1262), the Church was as wealthy as other countries in relative terms, possibly even more so.

26 See, for example, J. Van Engen, 'The Christian Middle Ages as an historiographical problem', *The American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), pp. 519–51; J.-C. Schmitt, 'Les superstitions', in J. Le Goff and R. Remond (eds.), *Histoire de la France religieuse*, 1 (Paris, 1988), pp. 419–551.

27 P. Geary, *Living with the dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1994), pp. 10–29.

As the Church received its property through donations from the laity, it is difficult to imagine great ecclesiastical wealth without the laity believing in its message. Further, despite the various kinds of criticism that can be directed against the ignorance and laziness of medieval priests, the strong ecclesiastical organisation must have been a powerful instrument in establishing Christianity as the dominating cult and doctrine.

Preaching – oral and visual

There is, then, hardly any reason to doubt the general importance of Christianity in Scandinavian society in the Middle Ages. Its exact character in the various countries and regions is, however, another and more complicated matter. As in the rest of Europe most of our source material regarding religion is generated by the élite and has to be used with considerable care and ingenuity to provide information on common people. Sermons, which have been preserved from all the Nordic countries, probably give some impression of ordinary preaching. The extant Scandinavian sermons belong to both the two main phases of medieval preaching: the early one, based on the tradition of the Church Fathers, and the later, introduced by the Mendicants in the thirteenth century. The early tradition had two main types: the *homilia*, the exegesis of a biblical text, and the *sermo*, which was a freer exposition of a particular theme.²⁸ The two tended to merge in the Middle Ages. Allegorical interpretation was frequently used in both types. The novelties introduced by the Mendicants were the more extensive and systematic use of *exempla*, i.e. concrete stories intended to capture the interest of the audience and underline the preachers' religious and moral message, and further, the influence of scholasticism which made the preachers adapt an elaborate composition and try to convince their audience with logical arguments.

The Norwegian and Icelandic *Books of Homilies*, both probably dating from the twelfth century, belong entirely to the early phase and contain sermons that are largely adaptations of late ancient and early medieval authors: Gregory the Great, Caesarius of Arles, Bede, and several Carolingian authors. Most extant Danish and Swedish sermons belong to the second phase, dating from the fourteenth century onwards.²⁹ The Danish ones, which so far are the only to

28 E. Gunnes, 'Innledning', in A. Salvesen (trans.), *Gammelnorsk Homiliebok* (Oslo, 1971), p. 10; O. Hjelde, 'Norsk preken i det 12. århundre: Studier i Gammel Norsk Homiliebok' (unpublished manuscript, Oslo, 1990).

29 A. Riising, *Danmarks middelalderlige prædigen* (København, 1969). Her material contains only one earlier example, from the twelfth or thirteenth century.

have been subject to examination by modern scholars, make extensive use of exempla; however, with the exception of some sermons clearly intended for a learned audience, they show no influence from scholasticism.

The general impression of the Scandinavian sermons is one of continuity and similarity with the rest of Europe. On the positive side, this conclusion confirms the impression that Scandinavia was fairly well integrated into Western Christendom, and, further, that the written sermons give a fairly representative impression of the actual preaching. They were hardly the products of great and original minds and they borrowed much from other Christian sources. On the negative side, this lack of originality makes it difficult to draw conclusions from their references to particular sins or habits of their audience or their emphasis on particular aspects of doctrine or ethical teaching. Often what appears to be inspired by particular conditions in Scandinavia is directly derived from foreign sources.³⁰ On the other hand, quotations or allusions to foreign sermons might be applied very specifically to the preachers' own audience.³¹ The problem for modern scholars is to distinguish between the two.

As for the content of the sermons, they have in common a practical orientation, urging their audience to seek salvation by believing in the doctrine of the Church, doing good deeds and avoiding sin. In accordance with the usual picture of medieval Christianity a certain change of emphasis can be traced from the collective to the individual. The early sermons are mainly addressed to a collective audience, while the later ones seem mainly concerned with the individual. Their main emphasis is on the relationship between God and the individual soul, and the Church is regarded as an institution but not as a community in the real sense.³² This change is expressed particularly clearly in the question of eschatology. The Norwegian Book of Homilies mainly focuses on the Last Judgement and even contains two sermons directly devoted to this theme. The Danish sermons are almost exclusively concerned with the judgement of each soul immediately after death, in accordance with the general trend in this direction in the later Middle Ages.³³

The earlier sermons are written in a fairly sober style, appealing to the intellect more than to the senses by presenting the doctrine of the Church and the alternatives facing the audience in this life and after death without elaborating on them. By contrast, the later sermons are often strongly emotional,

30 See, for example, Gunnes, 'Innledning', pp. 13–14.

31 Riising, *Danmarks middelalderlige Prædigen*, pp. 67–8.

32 Ibid., p. 453.

33 On this change, see A. Nedkvitne, *Møtet med døden i norrøn middelalder: En mentalitetshistorisk studie* (Oslo, 1997), pp. 62–71.

appealing to the senses by drastic stories of sin and virtue, by gloomy reflections of the great majority of mankind ending in hell, and by describing the sufferings of the damned in great detail.³⁴ However, the greater emphasis on the individual does not lead to a corresponding emphasis on the subjective aspect of morality. Sin is normally understood in a very concrete sense as actions, and drastic punishments are meted out in hell for sins against the ritual commandments or the dogmas of the Church, without discussion of intention or circumstances.

Late medieval art gives a similar picture. A large number of wall paintings have been preserved from the fifteenth and early sixteenth century in Denmark and parts of Sweden, mainly in local churches, and these paintings have been subject to extensive iconographic analysis during recent years.³⁵ In addition to the usual scenes from the history of salvation from the Old and the New Testament, these paintings excel in drastic descriptions of the devil's temptations and the punishment in hell, in a similar way as the *exempla* in the sermons. The popular character of these paintings may possibly indicate that the local peasants had some influence on them and thus give some indication of popular religion, although there is no firm evidence for such an assumption.

The changes in religious expression, in art as well as in preaching, have often been understood as the expression of a new mentality of fear and hysteria as a consequence of the Black Death. No doubt, the frequent outbursts of plague in the late Middle Ages must have created fear. Nevertheless, the idea of the whole period being dominated by fear seems too much to be the result of modern scholars imagining their own reactions to such disasters. Medieval men were after all accustomed to disease and sudden death to a far greater extent than we are. Moreover, most of the religious expressions of the brevity of life and terrible punishments in hell had their origin before the Black Death. The gradual change in the direction of a more vivid and emotional representation of these ideas from the late thirteenth century should probably rather be understood partly as a change in rhetorical expression from abstract symbols to concrete representation of visual reality, and partly as an attempt by the Church to make the laity active participants in religious life. The two explanations are probably related, and both trends seem largely to be the result of the new piety introduced by the Mendicants.

34 Riising, *Danmarks middelalderlige Prædigen*, pp. 289–318.

35 E. Nyborg, *Fanden på væggen* (København, 1978); U. Haastrup and R. Egevang, *Danske kalkmalerier: Gotik 1375–1475 and Sengotik 1475–1500* (København, no year).

The religion of the laity

The popular response to the message of the Church mainly has to be traced indirectly. Miracles, pilgrimages, and the cult of the saints thus bear witness to ordinary people's attachment to the Church and Christianity, although some sources indicate that magic of a more or less pagan character was also practised.³⁶ Christian as well as magic rituals provide clear evidence of people turning to the supernatural to seek help against disease and other difficulties in life. They tell less about the search for God and salvation in the life to come. However, this is largely due to the character of the source material. The extant miracle collections are intended to prove the sanctity of particular persons by showing that they had performed 'real' miracles, contrary to the normal working of nature. Consequently, the phenomena of conversions or spiritual experience were too vague to be accepted as evidence.

The 'production' of new saints would also seem to be a likely criterion for the penetration of Christianity in a given area. In his great book on medieval sainthood, André Vauchez distinguishes between 'hot' and 'cold' regions, according to their ability to produce saints.³⁷ Scandinavia as a whole must be considered relatively 'cold'. Most of the saints venerated in the region during the Middle Ages were the common saints of western Christendom as they appear in the Roman calendar. However, some local saints emerged from fairly early on, and a few of them were even venerated outside Scandinavia.³⁸ Most Scandinavian saints belong to Vauchez' northern type, i.e. they are people holding high office who are mainly venerated for their miracles after death. Their official lives are usually very impersonal and stereotyped, as well as fairly brief, while the main focus is on their miracles. By contrast, the southern type is a charismatic figure, whose reputation for sanctity is largely based on a remarkable life – St Francis is the best known example. The only real example of this kind of saint in Scandinavia is St Birgitta of Vadstena in Sweden (1303–73).

A recent study of sainthood in the later Middle Ages indicates that the ecclesiastical élite was very influential in the promotion of the cult of the

36 On various aspects of popular religion in the Middle Ages, see A. Nedkvitne and P. Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg* (Oslo bys historie, 1, Oslo, 1991), pp. 279–312; Nedkvitne, *Møtet med døden*; A. Fröjmark, *Mirakler och helgonkult: Linköpings biskopsdöme under senmedeltiden* (Uppsala, 1992); L. Bisgaard, 'Det religiøse liv i senmiddelalderen', in P. Inge-mann and J. V. Jensen (eds.), *Danmark i senmiddelalderen* Århus, 1994), pp. 342–62; C. Krötzl, *Pilger, Mirakel und Alltag: Formen des Verhaltens im skandinavischen Mittelalter* (Tampere, 1994); D. Segev, *Medieval Magic and Magicians – in Norway and Elsewhere* (Oslo, 2001).

37 A. Vauchez, *La Sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Age d'après le procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques* (Rome, 1980), pp. 121–9, 154–62.

38 E. Jørgensen, *Helgendyrkelse i Danmark* (København, 1909); E. Bull, *Folk og kirke i middelalderen* (Kristiania and København, 1912); Fröjmark, *Mirakler*.

saints in this period.³⁹ This was not only the result of the introduction of papal monopoly on canonisation, necessitating a long and costly process which had to be initiated and paid for by the ecclesiastical élite. Examples from the miracles' collections show that the ecclesiastical authorities often led the people in the direction of particular saints they wanted to promote. Nevertheless, the people were essential in order to obtain canonisation, because a saint needed a reputation for sanctity as well as a number of well attested miracles. There are also examples of genuinely popular cults in opposition to the ecclesiastical authorities, usually of people who had suffered a sudden or tragic death.

The Church was probably more successful in the field of cult than in the field of ethics. It did, however, gain at least one important victory, in Scandinavia as well as in the rest of Europe: its doctrine of marriage was accepted, at least in law and theory.⁴⁰ Divorce was banned and the prohibitions against marriage in forbidden degrees were made official law, controlled by the Church. The woman's consent now became a necessary precondition for a lawful marriage. Although the clerics were not particularly eager to enforce this provision there are examples in the sources of marriages being annulled because of the lack of such consent. Until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries we have evidence of concubinage being practised publicly and officially as a regular kind of relationship, normally in cases where the woman's social status was somewhat below that of the man. Thus, most Norwegian kings had such relationships, normally before marriage, and these unions often resulted in children who would later hold a prominent position. From the thirteenth century concubinage gradually came to be regarded as an unofficial and even illegal union and the sources tell far less about the offspring from such unions. This does not necessarily mean that such relationships became less common but certainly that their legal status changed. The attempts to introduce changes in this field may perhaps be compared to the attempts to introduce clerical celibacy. These attempts were successful in so far as the clerics did not officially marry and could not be succeeded by their sons, at least not without papal dispensation, but not in the sense that they stopped having sexual relationships

39 Fröjmark, *Mirakler*.

40 G. Duby, *Le chevalier, la femme et le prêtre: Le mariage dans la France féodale* (Paris, 1981); T. Nors, 'Kampen om ægteskabet', *Den jyske historiker*, 42 (1987), pp. 28–46; E. Ebel, *Der Konkubinat nach altwestnordischen Quellen* (Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde, 8, Berlin, 1993); H. Paludan, *Familia og familie: To europeiske kulturelementers møde i højmiddelalderens Danmark* (Århus, 1995); I. Holtan, *Ekteskap, frillelivnad og hordom i norsk høgmellomalder* (Oslo, 1996); A. Magnúsdóttir, *Frillor och fruar: politik och samlevnad på Island 1120–1400* (Göteborg, 2001).

with women.⁴¹ As far as we can deduce from the sources, they seem quite often to have lived in regular concubinage.

The Church's new and stricter rules in this field were accompanied, from the thirteenth century, by a more positive attitude to marriage. The frequent representations of Adam and Eve on Danish wall-paintings from the fourteenth century onwards, often as happily married with children, may possibly be regarded as evidence of this attitude and as propaganda for the ecclesiastical ideal of the monogamous marriage.

While there can hardly be any doubt that the Church succeeded in introducing its doctrine and rituals in Scandinavia in the Middle Ages there is less evidence of the newer trends towards a more personal religion which, in the later Middle Ages, were expressed for instance in the *devotio moderna*. This may be due to the nature of the sources; after all, the external aspect of religion is more likely to leave traces than the internal one and the new Lutheran Church was not interested in preserving Catholic devotional literature. We should also guard against the 'Protestant' tendency to conclude that the presence of an external piety indicates the absence of an internal one. Nevertheless, the extant sermons, as far as they have been analysed, the number and type of saints, and the religious art mainly seem to point in the 'traditional' direction. So also does the fact that there are few examples of heresy in Scandinavia. Rather than giving witness to the Scandinavians' faithful adherence to the Catholic Church this absence seems to indicate that the personal religion was weaker, that religious customs and rituals were well integrated into daily life, but that few people were personally moved by the message of the Gospel.

If we turn to the heresy that eventually occurred in Scandinavia and led rapidly to the abolition of the Catholic Church, i.e. the Protestant Reformation, we may notice a significant difference between Denmark and Sweden on the one hand and Norway and Iceland on the other. The former countries had a real Reformation movement and even to some extent a Counter-Reformation, while in Norway, and to a lesser extent Iceland, the Reformation was introduced from above, with little preparation. Consequently, the new trends in the pre-Reformation Church are more likely to be found in the former countries than in the latter. This impression is also confirmed by the fact that the Mendicants were stronger in Sweden and particularly Denmark than in Norway. In addition to the Franciscans and the Dominicans, the Carmelites were introduced in the fifteenth century; they founded a number of houses and were

41 E. Gunnes, 'Prester og deier – sølibatet i norsk middelalder', in S. Imsen and G. Sandvik (eds.), *Hamarspor: Eit festskrift til Lars Hamre* (Oslo, 1982), pp. 20–44.

engaged in the reform of the Church. The most prominent example of religious renewal is, however, the Bridgettine movement, which also influenced the laity, particularly the social élite.

Aristocratic religion

While the sources are fairly meagre regarding the religion of ordinary people they give a lot more information on the nobility, though this information has not been used very extensively so far.⁴² The numerous sources from the later Middle Ages which were written by the nobility give a strong impression of the pervasive influence of the Church and religion. God is frequently referred to in correspondence, whatever the subject matter, in phrases like 'by God's will', 'if God allows', 'may God protect you', and so forth. Such expressions are clearly not evidence of personal piety but they give some indication of the general atmosphere – in the same way as their absence in present-day society emphasises its secular character. Extant testaments show nobles leaving enormous sums to the Church. Such generosity was not always appreciated by society; relatives clearly had opposite interests to those of the Church and often sought to contest what they considered to be excessive donations, sometimes successfully.

On the other hand, the aristocratic insistence on honour, revenge and secular display was difficult to reconcile with Christian ethics, although the opposition between the two sets of values might be somewhat modified by the fact that the prelates often held the same values and acted in a similar way as the secular aristocracy. Ecclesiastical criticism of the aristocratic values is also expressed in sermons and religious art, attacking the obsession with the glory and pleasures of this world and pointing to the narrow path leading to salvation. We are badly informed about how this tension was experienced or possibly solved by individual nobles or the class as a whole. However, it is not simply a question of ideals versus practice. When failing to adhere to the Christian norms the medieval aristocrat often acted in accordance with a specifically aristocratic ethic and set of values. Thus, the noble had to manoeuvre between various ethical codes. Only on his deathbed would he fully embrace Christian values. From this point of view great generosity to the Church may be regarded as a payment for retaining a specifically aristocratic ethic and lifestyle.

Such generosity should not only be regarded as an expression of piety but also as an aspect of the ostentation that was an essential part of the lifestyle of

⁴² For this and the following, see Bisgaard, *Tjenesteideal*.

the nobility. Funerals and anniversaries in particular were celebrated with great pomp and circumstance, the Church and religion thus offering an opportunity for noble families to show off their wealth and the honour and great deeds of one of their members. The rite of leading the deceased's saddle horse into the church at his funeral is particularly impressive from this point of view. Having been led to his master's coffin in the church, thus symbolically following him to his grave, the horse is given as a sacrifice to the church and afterwards has to be redeemed for a large sum of money by the heirs.⁴³ In this way, funerals of members of the nobility served to unite the ideals of the noble and clerical estates of society, creating an occasion for showing off wealth and distinction as well as expressing piety.

From 'society of kindred' to 'society of the state'?

The idea of a change in the high Middle Ages from a society based on strong kin groups in mutual competition to a hierarchically organised society governed by the king, i.e. corresponding to some definition of a state, has a long tradition in Scandinavian historiography. Nowadays, the idea of a 'society of kindred' has come under strong attack and must be considered obsolete in its classical form, as a society of patrilineal lineages. Nevertheless, a change did take place, with a society based on personal ties and face-to-face relationships becoming one based on larger, hierarchical organisations such as the monarchy and the Church.

The preceding pages have dealt with the cultural and mental aspect of this development. *Obedience* and *service* became virtues in a secular as well as a religious sense, both the king and God demanding these virtues from their inferiors. The difference between the élite in the direct service of the king and the élite in the direct service of God was emphasised by an exclusive culture and particular rules of behaviour: the courtly culture, influenced from France and Germany in the case of the former, the learned Latin culture in the case of the latter. Between these cultures there was tension as well as cooperation. The aristocratic culture was to a certain degree secular, celebrating the glory of this world, food, dress, pleasures, and sexual love. Nevertheless, the two held largely the same ideas of hierarchy and social order and the king's claims to govern society were based on his position as God's representative on earth. At least in the later Middle Ages references to God and pious formulas abound in the vocabulary of the nobility, as reflected in their correspondence. And

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 50–1.

ecclesiastical ceremonies, in particular funerals, served as combined expressions of noble piety and conspicuous consumption.

We know less of popular religion, but the wealth of the Church as well as the glimpses of ordinary people seeking the aid of God and the saints in the collections of miracles clearly indicate a general attachment to the Christian religion. With some exceptions, however, the new tendencies towards personal piety seem to be less prominent in Scandinavia than in the more central regions of Western Christendom.

How far did Scandinavian mentality change during the Middle Ages? Most of our evidence has a certain 'external' character. Although the difference between 'internal' and 'external' was probably less than is often implied by modern scholars with a Protestant background there are problems in deducing inner convictions and attitudes from rituals, customs and standard phrases. Further, whatever conclusions we may draw from such external expressions, we have to be aware that there was also continuity from the previous period. The concept of honour expanded to include the service of the king and the system of social rank but it was apparently expressed in much the same way as before in conflicts with people of the same social rank. In the religious field some of the old magic practices and related ideas survived and the new Christian religion was not simply accepted as an absolute truth, imported from abroad; it was adapted to serve the purposes of various social groups, peasants as well as nobles. We still have a very imperfect picture of this development but there are reasons to believe that the relationship between social, cultural and mental change, in the religious as well as the more secular field, will become increasingly important in future research.

Literature

LARS LÖNNROTH, VÉSTEINN ÓLASON AND ANDERS PILTZ

From an international point of view Scandinavian literature of the Middle Ages is largely identified with the narrative literature of Iceland, particularly the myths of the Edda and the classical family sagas. And it is true that these celebrated works, written in a remote island where West Scandinavians had settled during the Viking period, are nowadays generally considered medieval Scandinavia's most remarkable contribution to world literature. In order to fully understand these texts, however, one must see them in the wider context of European and specifically Nordic literary tradition, oral as well as written, and not only in the Norse or Scandinavian language but also in Latin.¹

Although the early Germanic myths, poetic forms and narrative patterns were generally best preserved in west Scandinavia, i.e. in Iceland and Norway, some of the early Norse traditions have in fact only survived in east Scandinavia, i.e. in Denmark and Sweden, although usually mixed with Christian and Latin learning, which influenced literary production much more strongly in the east than in the west. Moreover, medieval writers living not only in

¹ For Scandinavian medieval literature in general, see the following surveys: T. M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey* (New Haven, 1964); H. Bekker-Nielsen et al., *Norrøn fortællekunst: Kapitler af den norsk-islandske middelalderlitteraturs historie* (København, 1965); M. Brøndsted (ed.), *Nordens litteratur før 1860* (København, 1972); C. Clover and J. Lindow (eds.), *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Ithaca and London, 1985); O. Friis, *Den danske litteraturs historie*, 1, *Fra oldtiden til renæssansen* (København, 1937–45); L. Holm-Olsen, 'Middelalderens litteratur i Norge', in E. Beyer (ed.), *Norges litteraturhistorie*, 1 (Oslo, 1974); S. Kaspersen et al., *Dansk litteraturhistorie*, 1, *Fra runer til ridderdigtning o. 800–1480* (København, 1984); J. Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas* (1988); P. Lehmann, *Skandinaviens Anteil an der lateinischen Literatur und Wissenschaft des Mittelalters*, 1–2 (*Sitzungsbericht der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1936–7); L. Lönnroth and S. Delblanc (eds.), *Den svenska litteraturen*, 1, *Från forntid till frihetstid* (Stockholm, 1987); S. Nordal (ed.), *Nordisk kultur*, 8: A–B (Stockholm, Oslo and København, 1943–53); V. Ólason (ed.), *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, 1–2 (Reykjavík, 1992–3); E. Ó. Sveinsson, *Íslenzkar bókmenntir i fornöld*, 1 (Reykjavík, 1962); E. N. Tigerstedt (ed.), *Ny illustrerad svensk litteraturhistoria*, 1, *Forntiden, medeltiden, Vasatiden* (Stockholm, 1955); G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford, 1953).

Iceland but also on the Scandinavian peninsula or in Denmark made several important contributions to the religious literature of the Church and also to such secular European genres as the ballad, the romance and the rhyme chronicle. And although the earliest secular literature was strongly dominated by the Norwegian court and by the Icelandic skalds and saga-writers, it was the Danes and the Swedes who controlled the major centres of literary production towards the end of the Middle Ages.

In this survey we shall, therefore, first consider the nature of oral and written tradition in the east and in the west respectively, identify the major centres of literary creativity, and then follow the literary development within each of the major medieval genres without too much concern for national boundaries, since these were hardly of major importance in medieval Scandinavia, the language being very similar in all the countries throughout most of the period. Special attention will be paid, however, to the classical masterpieces of medieval Iceland.

The language of tradition: oral genres

When the Church brought the Latin alphabet and European learning to Scandinavia, the culture of the region was basically oral, although runes played a certain role as already described. Traditional oral culture encompassed all aspects of life. It has left its impression in the language, in place-names for instance, in popular customs, in remains of material culture such as stone-carvings, and in later literature, but many important features are no doubt irretrievably lost. What primarily concerns us here are those forms of verbal art that became an essential component in literary works.

In spite of great variety Scandinavian literature on traditional matters has a consistency of character wherever it is found, and it bears a deep affinity in form and ideas with traditional culture of similar kinds from other Germanic regions.

The most obvious parallel between west and north Germanic tradition is the heroic poetry. We find legends of a similar character, sometimes about the same persons characterised by the same gloomy spirit presented in basically the same metre and a very similar style. In Icelandic manuscripts we also find poetry in the same metre and style treating mythological and didactic matters; isolated formulae as well as names of deities found in continental tradition form a connection to this poetry. More specifically Scandinavian, and even west Nordic, to judge by the extant texts, is the praise poetry about princes and warriors in intricate metres, practised by Norwegian and Icelandic skalds

in the Viking Age and received and prized by princes in Scandinavia and the British Isles.

Apart from traditional poetry there must have existed a lively tradition of prose narrative in the first ages of Christianity, but it is impossible to know the form such tales took, whether there were different prose genres. Obviously the laws must have been distinct in many ways.

The literary heritage based on oral tradition with roots in the Viking Age, which was mainly created and preserved in Iceland, forms an impressive body of material. Oral forms were by necessity changed or even transformed by the writing process, but literature has preserved much that is based on authentic oral art.

There must have been considerable regional differences in the oral culture of Scandinavia, and it would be rash to project the image created by Icelandic literature directly onto the larger screen of Scandinavia. These regional differences are likely to have arisen partly because of internal developments and partly because of external influences. During the Viking Age and in the subsequent period a cultural influence from the British Isles made itself clearly felt in Norway. Some of the settlers of Iceland had previously lived in Ireland or northern Scotland and the Hebrides, and this must have had some effect on their culture and world view, but the much debated Celtic influence never seems to have penetrated deep into the cultural fabric. The oral culture of the settlers of Iceland was essentially Scandinavian, however, and more particularly Norse or Norwegian in character, but in the period from the settlement to the age of writing, Icelandic culture developed its own characteristics. The social and cultural differences between Iceland and mainland Scandinavia must be seen as the basic reason why Iceland received Christianity and its culture in its own way and developed a distinctive literature that is unique in spite of its dependency on European learning and Scandinavian oral culture.

Scandinavia received Christianity from the south (Germany) and south-west (the British Isles). The eastern parts accepted Latin as their main literary language, although the native tongue was mainly used for writing the law. Norway and Iceland held more firmly to their native tongue, and we have seen that the Norwegians started to record laws no later than the second half of the eleventh century while the Icelanders began in the early twelfth century. The writing of historical prose in the vernacular commenced in Iceland in the first third of the twelfth century, while clerics in Norway and Iceland translated religious prose and used traditional poetic forms to praise the Lord and his saints. This employment of the vernacular in the service of the Church no doubt was the precondition for the development of secular literature.

Clerical innovation and adaptation

As a result of the Christianisation the Church introduced in Scandinavia not only a new alphabet and a new language, Latin, but also an entirely new way of looking at poetic creativity. The oral performance of the native skald or storyteller gradually gave way to the literary composition of the cleric, trained in Latin rhetoric and familiar with the foreign genres of medieval Europe. This transformation, however, happened quite differently in different parts of the Scandinavian world.

In east Scandinavia the old system was almost completely replaced by the new one, with Latin becoming the dominating literary language, and the traditional oral genres quickly passed into oblivion. In west Scandinavia and particularly in Iceland, on the other hand, the vernacular was used for most kinds of writing, and the native forms of poetry and saga were not only accepted but encouraged and cultivated within the new order. Some of these native forms, particularly skaldic poetry, demonstrated strong resistance to the influence from European tradition, while others were merged with the foreign literary genres, giving rise to interesting new types of literature in the vernacular.

There are many reasons for this difference between east and west. One of them is evidently that the Church in west Scandinavia, particularly in Iceland, at an early date became well integrated in the secular power structure and consequently more respectful in its attitude to local tradition than was the Church in east Scandinavia, where there was always a very wide gap between the (native) culture of the people and the (foreign) culture of the clerics. Influence from Britain, much stronger in the west, may also have played a part in encouraging writing in the vernacular.

Moreover, the Swedish church (including Finland) was organised according to universal canonical standards only as late as 1248. By then, foreign studies on a larger scale were made possible by the newly established cathedral chapters (on a scholarship basis) and the mendicant orders (as part of their internal education system). When this took place, scholasticism was in full flower. Its primary concern was neither literature nor history, which by Aristotelian standards were no matters of scholarly interest, but 'science'. There was no longer a market for the learned cleric, writing Latin literature for pleasure. The texts should serve pious purposes, such as liturgy or private edification.

Another reason for the cultural gap between east and west is that skaldic art, although encouraged by rulers all over the Viking world, had in the tenth century become a west Scandinavian speciality, almost monopolised

by a small number of Icelandic chieftain families. Native poetic tradition was thus stronger in Iceland than anywhere else in Scandinavia, even before Christianisation, and it continued to be strong for several centuries, supported by Norwegian kings and Icelandic chieftains with the assistance of native clerics.

In Sweden and Denmark, on the other hand, there is very little continuity between the literary world of runic inscriptions and the literary world of the earliest manuscripts, which are almost contemporary with the latest runestones but mostly in Latin and showing almost no influence from the native genres. The most important exception is the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus, the superbly written Latin chronicle from around 1200, based on old Scandinavian myths, poems and legends. But Saxo points out that his sources were Icelandic to a large extent, and he is himself careful to transform them, so that they will conform with the style, rhetoric and poetic conventions of Latin literature. It is thus evident that he is living in a literary climate that differs considerably from that of west Scandinavia.

Centres of literary creativity

It was the Church that brought writing and literature to Scandinavia, and it was from the Church and its people that the first literature came, also in the vernacular. No manuscripts have been preserved from the eleventh century; the oldest fragments with vernacular texts are from the following century. The first west Nordic milieus of literary activity must have been centred on the episcopal sees of Trondheim (Nidaros), Bergen and possibly Oslo in Norway, and Skálholt and Hólar in Iceland. The establishment of the Norwegian church province in 1152–3 contributed to make the archiepiscopal see of Trondheim a centre for religious literary activities all through the Middle Ages. Monasteries also played an important role in the creation and preservation of literary culture both in Norway and Iceland.

Secular powers soon discovered the usefulness of writing. In Iceland an informal alliance arose between a few chieftain families and the Church, resulting in the first recording of laws by a cleric at the farm of the law-speaker in 1117–18. At the same time, or a few years later, Ari Thorgilsson (1067–1148) started Icelandic history-writing in the vernacular with his *Íslendingabók*, a short history of Iceland from the settlement, describing the development of the most important institutions with a particular emphasis on the history of the Church. A preface to this work refers to the bishops and Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056–1133) as mentors of the work. Sæmundr, a priest and chieftain of Oddi in the bishopric of Skálholt, had already written about the Norwegian kings

in Latin. Though Ari did not himself live in Skálholt he can be connected with the milieu around the episcopal see and the church farms of Haukadal and Oddi in the south. Here, learned clerics of chieftain families took care to preserve orally and on vellum the traditional lore of their forefathers at the same time as they educated priests and furnished them with the necessary Latin texts to enable them to fulfil their function. In the bishopric of Skálholt the Augustinian monasteries of Thykkvibær, Viðey and Helgafell later became important centres of scribal activity.

Learning also flowered in northern Iceland under the first bishop of Hólar, Jón Ögmundsson (in office 1106–1121), who imported learned clerics from abroad to teach music and arithmetic. However, scribal activities seem to have been even greater in the Benedictine monasteries, first at Thingeyrar and later at Möðruvellir.

Obviously there was a greater number of clerics and greater wealth in the Norwegian cathedral towns which acted as magnets on the monastic movement and had cathedral schools from the latter part of the twelfth century. These towns were also seats of royal local and regional administration, and the kings stayed there with their *hirð* for longer periods. In the twelfth century the most important centre of learning in Norway was Trondheim with its archiepiscopal see and a strong royal presence. In the thirteenth century we have seen that Bergen may be called the first true capital of Norway. Its royal court became a main centre of literary activity in the reign of Hákon Hákonsson and continued to be so under his son and grandsons, although Oslo grew in importance during the reign of Hákon V in the early fourteenth century. At the initiative of the king learned men were occupied in recording and making laws and composing didactic literature such as *Konungs skuggsiá* and historiographical works such as the sagas of King Hákon and his son Magnus Law-mender. Impulses of European chivalric culture were undoubtedly channelled through Bergen and later Oslo to Norway and Iceland, and even the whole of Scandinavia.

The Norse earls of Orkney welcomed skalds at their court, and during the reign of Earl Ragnvald (d. 1158), himself an excellent poet, and throughout the rest of the twelfth century there was great interest in the traditional art of the skald and in heroic legends. The extant poetry from the Orkney milieu shows influence from Latin learning as well as some knowledge of the vernacular lyric poetry of the troubadours.

While literacy was gaining a foothold, oral culture must have thrived, and its centres of creativity must have been the courts of kings, the *thing* assemblies, and the homes of chieftains where relatively large audiences were gathered

and rewards awaited those who excelled in poetry or storytelling. Such centres would explain the aristocratic flavour of much that is left of Old Norwegian and Icelandic poetry while we must assume that the common folk also cherished less pretentious genres. In the thirteenth century it is known that scribal activities took place and literature was created at the farms of some Icelandic chieftains, farms where there were also churches and clerics. This was the case at Snorri Sturluson's farm of Reykholt, where he composed his sagas and his unique work on poetics and mythology, the *Prose Edda* or *Snorra Edda*. From the later Middle Ages we know of strong ties between monasteries and chieftain families, such as the monastery of Helgafell where many of the books later owned by the wealthy families of Skarð and Reykhólar were written. The origin of Icelandic literature with secular themes must be sought in the close cooperation between a chieftain class with secular and historical interests and people of the Church.

In early medieval Denmark and Sweden there is no clear evidence of any literary activity, in the sense of 'writing', outside the realm of the Church, except for the carving of short runic inscriptions. Furthermore, most of the early monasteries in east Scandinavia, unlike those of west Scandinavia, belonged to the Cistercian order, which did not encourage the writing of manuscripts except for very pious purposes. This means that literary production was originally confined to very few centres of clerical learning. The hagiographic literature created at the see of Odense from about 1100 has already been mentioned (Chapter 8(b)). Other centres of clerical learning were the cathedral schools of Lund, Ribe and Roskilde in Denmark, and of Uppsala, Linköping and Skara in Sweden.

In the late Middle Ages new types of monasteries, of which the most famous was St Birgitta's foundation, Vadstena, in Sweden, became even more important centres of Latin learning and education, but the leading position of such monasteries was eventually challenged by the founding of the first universities, in Uppsala (1477) and København (1479). Long before that, in the early fourteenth century, a secular literature in the vernacular had started to develop in the royal chancelleries and in a few castles belonging to aristocratic families influenced by the chivalric culture of France and Germany. These secular centres were, in all probability, the places where the courtly romances, the rhymed chronicles, and also the famous Scandinavian ballads were first composed and performed.

In addition to the clerical and aristocratic centres of literary creativity there were probably other types of social environments, more open to the general public, where texts were produced and circulated – for example, markets,

thing meetings, taverns, and so on. Unfortunately, however, we have little or no information about such places. It would be interesting to know, for example, exactly where and how the provincial laws originated, since these are the only east Scandinavian texts from the Middle Ages that seem to have preserved – together with legal learning brought in by clerics from abroad – at least some faint traces of a very archaic narrative style similar to that found in early Norse poetry and in some Icelandic sagas. Many of these laws, particularly the Swedish ones, contain alliterative formulas and splendid saga-like accounts of legal cases which suggest that the law-makers were important guardians of native literary and oral tradition.

Scandinavians abroad

The first Scandinavians known to have studied at foreign centres of learning are Icelanders in the eleventh century. The first two bishops of Skálholt, Ísleifr (1056–80) and Gizurr (1082–1118), were educated in a German monastic school, and the above-mentioned Sæmundr Sigfússon, Gizurr's contemporary, had in his young days studied in France. In the twelfth century some Icelandic, Danish and Norwegian clerics are known to have obtained their learning in northern continental monastic and cathedral schools, before they started to go to the more independent universities which came into being from the end of the century. At first they travelled to the universities of Paris and Bologna, partly also to Orléans, Montpellier, Oxford and Cambridge. From the latter half of the thirteenth century they were joined by Swedish and Finnish students.

In the late Middle Ages there was a marked shift from west to east: Paris was still visited by quite a few Scandinavian students up to about 1450, but it was the new universities east of the Rhine which now attracted most Scandinavians, first Prague and Leipzig, and then, from the early fifteenth century, the north German universities, especially Rostock. The Nordic countries now became part of the German cultural sphere, and north German universities continued to draw Scandinavian students to them after the first Nordic universities had been established in Uppsala and København in the 1470s.

We must assume that much of the foreign literature that was introduced in the Nordic countries throughout the Middle Ages was brought home and translated by clerics who had spent some time at one of the foreign universities. Little is known, however, about the contribution of Scandinavian schoolmen to scholastic learning in Europe.

Two philosophers of Danish origin deserve to be mentioned, Boëthius (Bo) and Martinus de Dacia (Denmark), who belonged to the Danish school of

language philosophy in Paris (the ‘modists’). Boëthius (d. about 1280) was reputed to have introduced the doctrine of the ‘double truth’: what is evident to reason may be wrong to faith. No doubt this was a distortion of his teaching. What he meant was that theology and philosophy have and should have different approaches to truth. By faith certain things are known which are impervious to reason, because they are beyond the grasp of reason, not because they are unreasonable. His tenets, later accepted as evident, were condemned in 1277. Martinus (d. 1304) returned to Denmark from Paris to become the chancellor to King Erik Menved (see Chapter 12(b)). He wrote a famous textbook *De modis significandi* on speculative grammar, where he sustains the thesis that reality, thought and speech do correspond to each other.

Scandinavians were the first to teach astronomy in Paris. The Danes made important contributions to this science (Petrus Philomela de Dacia, Johannes Simonis de Selandia, Nicolaus de Dacia). The Swedish Master Björn of Lödöse (d. 1463) lectured on philosophy in Vienna for thirty years.

Mythical-heroic poetry

Eddic poetry, already described in Chapter 6, was collected and written down in Iceland in the thirteenth century. The oldest and by far the most important manuscript is the *Codex regius* presented to the king of Iceland and Denmark in the seventeenth century and given back to the Icelandic people in 1971. The manuscript has been dated to c. 1270, but all or most of it is copied from older and now lost manuscripts. Palaeographical and linguistic evidence points to the first half of the thirteenth century as the age of collection. This dating accords with other literary activities in the period: the use of skaldic poetry in sagas and the composition of *Snorra Edda*. Most Eddic poems are only known from the *Codex regius* (cf. Chapter 6).

The formal characteristics of Eddic poetry and its most important themes have already been dealt with (Chapter 6), but questions of function and innovation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are important. What was the function of this poetry in a Christian peasant society? Had Eddic poetry developed or changed after the advent of writing? Are some of the Eddic poems literary compositions of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries? Answers to these questions are controversial.

It seems at first sight unlikely that poems about pagan gods were composed or radically recreated in Christian times, but the simple fact that this poetry survived for two centuries after Christianisation shows that it was cherished

and had some function. The strong poetic vision of *Völuspá*, for example, is always impressive, and what was seen as divine truth in one period has been understood symbolically in another. Much of the didacticism of *Hávamál* is neutral with regard to religion and can be relevant at all times while the mythological tales of Eddic poetry are highly entertaining. The antiquarian interests of the twelfth century may have been the cause of renewed interest and even new poetic treatment of some mythological matter. An example could be the forceful poem *Hymiskviða* about Thor's attempt to catch the world serpent. It is commonly considered a late composition.

A group of heroic poems, the so-called elegies, are by most scholars believed to be late, probably twelfth-century, compositions. Here emotional moments in heroic legend have been made the subjects of poems rather sentimental in nature and reminiscent of the ballads or songs of continental Europe. These poems, usually rather short and dominated by dialogue, have a strong feminine viewpoint, describing women lamenting the dead heroes and their own cruel fate. Gudrun, daughter of Gjúki, is at the centre of this poetry, but her rival Brynhild also plays a part. This poetry has been seen by Andreas Heusler as 'isländische Spätblühe' influenced by Christian sentimentality and oral sagas, while Wolfgang Mohr believed that these poems were influenced by German and Danish rhymed poetry and partly composed in Denmark and northern Germany. It should be remembered that Germanic poetry always had an elegiac aspect. The style and command of metre shows that these poems must have been composed where the tradition was thriving, probably in Iceland, but it seems possible that they have been composed under the influence of foreign literature.

Cruel and sentimental at the same time, but far from static or elegiac, the longest of all Eddic poems is *Atlamál*, called 'Greenlandic' in *Codex Regius*, a version of the story of the visit of the Burgundians to the court of Atli and Gudrun, describing how they were betrayed and killed and how Gudrun killed her sons and her husband in revenge. This is the story presented in *Atlakviða* and with some differences in *Nibelungenlied*, told in a new manner. Placed in a narrow world of farmers, with a much greater sense of domesticity and intimacy than the old versions, it lacks the terseness and the dignity of *Atlakviða* but matches its intensity and cruel fatalism. *Atlamál* is very well preserved and scholars agree that it is late and could even be a written composition.

Parts of the Eddic tradition are preserved intermingled with prose and even without a clear demarcation of individual poems, which may be a traditional feature. This is a characteristic of the poems about the early life of the hero Sigurd and his first meeting with the valkyrie. The same mixture of prose and

poetry is also found in early *fornaldarsögur* (see below) and probably reveals the way in which much of this matter was preserved.

It is difficult to know how long Eddic poetry survived as oral tradition; a few poems are only found in fourteenth-century manuscripts, but they are most likely copies of thirteenth-century recordings. The Eddic style was used, however, in composing new poetry for *fornaldarsögur*, while some fragments of heroic poetry included in such sagas may be old and preserved in oral tradition into the fourteenth century.

Storytelling

There is an interesting and often quoted description – written in the early thirteenth century – of storytelling at a prominent wedding that is supposed to have taken place at the wealthy Icelandic farm of Reykhólar in 1119:

And now there was much merriment and happiness, good entertainment and many kinds of games, dancing as well as wrestling and saga entertainment [*sagnaskemtan*] . . . People have told, although this is hardly a matter of importance, who provided the entertainment and how it was done. Such tales were told which now many people object to and pretend not to have known, for many are ignorant about truth and believe in fiction while they cast doubt upon facts. Hrólfr from Skálmarnes told the saga about Hröngviör the Viking and Óláfr Liðsmanna King and how Thráinn the Berserk broke into the burial mound and about Hrómundr Gripsson – and several verses were included. This saga was used for King Sverre's entertainment, and he said that such lying sagas [*lygisögur*] were the most enjoyable. And yet people know how to trace their ancestry back to Hrómundr Gripsson! Hrólfr himself had composed this saga. Ingimundr, the priest, told the saga of Ormr Barreyjarskáld including many verses and at the end of the saga a good poem that Ingimundr had made – and yet many wise men hold this saga to be true.

It would appear from this account that storytelling in the form of mythical-heroic sagas was a customary form of entertainment at festive occasions in medieval Iceland, and that priests as well as farmers could be expected to perform at such occasions. It would also appear that these narratives typically dealt with Viking adventures, were composed in a mixture of prose and poetry, and that it was a matter of controversy within the audience whether or not the stories contained any historical truth; some were evidently sceptical but at least some people would seriously believe what they heard and trace their own ancestry back to the saga heroes. The reference to King Sverre suggests

that oral sagas originating in Icelandic farms could eventually be used for the court entertainment of Norwegian rulers.

A similar inference may be drawn from another famous story, told in one of the kings' sagas (*Morkinskinna*, early thirteenth century), of an Icelandic who is supposed to have spent Christmas at the court of King Harald Hard-ruler of Norway around 1050. The king asked the Icelandic if he could contribute to the entertainment, and he answered that he knew some sagas. He then told these sagas to the court during the festive season and was given handsome gifts in return for his entertainment. The last narrative was about King Harald's own adventures as a young man in Constantinople, when he had served as leader of the Varangian guard in the palace of the Byzantine emperor. The Icelandic claimed to have learned this story at the *Althing* from one Halldór Snorrason, who had himself accompanied the king during those years. The king was evidently much amused and even moved by this account of his own legendary exploits, but he did not express any clear opinion about its truth, although the fact that he accepted it unconditionally has been taken to imply some sort of verification.

It is of course difficult to know whether these two accounts of oral storytelling are completely trustworthy or in every detail representative of the social customs that they portray. Most scholars tend to believe, however, that the Icelandic sagas written in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were at least to some extent derived from oral narratives, which had previously been presented in circumstances similar to those of the wedding in Reykhólar or the Christmas entertainment of King Harald. This would, at any rate, agree very well with what we know about the preservation of written saga literature in Iceland and Norway.

Skaldic poetry and *Snorra Edda*

It is one of the extraordinary features of high medieval Icelandic culture that the skaldic tradition, so deeply rooted in the Viking Age, should have survived. This intricate praise poetry with its enumeration of battles and vivid and approving descriptions of the gory realities of the battlefield appears to have formed the core of a semi-historical tradition about the rulers of Scandinavia from the early Viking Age well into the age of writing. The stanzas with the greatest claim to be authentic Viking Age poetry are of this nature, but remnants of poetry with mythological motifs also have many archaic features. It is more difficult to reach solid conclusions about the dating of poetry of a more private nature, poetry describing the feelings of lovesick young men or

a grieving father. Most of this poetry is, however, preserved in sagas, either as proof of saga historicity or as decoration, or even as a reflection of the inner life of a character.

A novelty introduced in the twelfth century and obviously connected with the antiquarian interests of the time are so called 'historical' poems, i.e. poems about Viking kings or heroes of the past such as Olaf Tryggvason or the Danish *Jómsvíkingar* and their attack on Norway in the late tenth century. Antiquarianism may indeed have prolonged the life of the genre considerably, partly because skaldic stanzas were in demand to embellish old tales. In the twelfth century there also arose a theoretical interest in the metres and stylistic intricacies of skaldic poetry, manifest at first in the *clavis metrica*, *Háttalykill*, composed in Orkney around the mid-twelfth century by Earl Ragnvald and an Icelandic skald, and then again in Snorri Sturluson's monumental *Edda*.

Snorra Edda or *The Prose Edda* is a unique and original work. It seems to have been conceived of as a textbook for young skalds, but at the same time it serves as a sort of encyclopaedia of pre-Christian mythology and poetry. The work begins with a prologue which places the mythological content of the work securely within the framework of Christian learning. The attitude is euhemeristic, and ideas about the pagan gods are characterised as an illusion arising from man's basic need to regain his lost knowledge of the world's creation and creator, rather than as Satan's attempt to ensnare humankind, as the missionaries would have it. In the next part, *Gylfaginning* ('the deluding of Gylfi'), pre-Christian mythology is presented as systematically as the sources allow. The presentation is based upon *Völuspá* and other mythological poems from the Poetic Edda, as well as tales and folk belief. The manner of presentation is in the style of medieval learning, through a dialogue between an ignorant outsider and a knowledgeable 'magister', who is in fact Odin himself in disguise. Many of the prose tales can be counted as jewels of narrative art. The second part, much more loosely composed, is *Skáldskaparmál* ('on poetic diction'), which has the main function of describing how kennings are formed. This part also includes a number of important mythological prose tales, as well as an invaluable anthology of skaldic poetry of all kinds, most notably mythological poetry preserved nowhere else. The third part is *Háttatal* ('catalogue of metres'), a praise poem of King Hákon of Norway and his father-in-law Earl Skule, in 102 stanzas with commentary, each of which demonstrates a particular variety of skaldic metre or style.

Although it lacked the barbaric splendour of Viking Age poetry, skaldic poetry on secular matters thrived in the thirteenth century and benefited

from an increased knowledge of the old skalds and their methods, based on Snorri's studies as well as the almost innumerable samples included in sagas by him and his contemporaries. The basic metres and stylistic effects lasted, however, even longer in a most unlikely place – in the religious poetry of the Church.

Kings' sagas

The kings' sagas, or *konungasögur*, were the first indigenous prose sagas recorded in writing. Most of them deal with the lives, feuds and battles of Norwegian kings – some of the earliest are about contemporary rulers – and the narrative material seems to be based primarily on skaldic poetry in combination with various oral tales (what German scholars have termed *Be-gleitprosa*) that accompanied the verses in the tradition and evidently circulated among royal retainers long after they had left the royal service and returned to their farms in Iceland or Norway. The form of the classical kings' sagas bears witness to such oral origins: skaldic verses are frequently quoted, and individual episodes are often built up around some incident involving the king and one of his Icelandic skalds, often culminating in the recitation of a poem.

As a literary genre, however, the *konungasaga* is also dependent on Latin historiography, and some of the earliest recordings were indeed written in the form of Latin texts, usually by priests or in monastic surroundings. The earliest of these texts may have been the first recording of the translation of St Olaf and the miracles worked by him (eleventh century?). The first real historians who wrote about the kings were probably Ari Thorgilsson and Sæmundr Sigfússon, the two Icelandic priests and *fróðir menn* ('well-informed men') mentioned earlier, but what they wrote about the kings has now been lost.

The work of Sæmundr and Ari was continued in three surveys of Norwegian history, all of them written in Norway, two in Latin and the third in Old Norse, during the latter half of the twelfth century: *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* by Theodoricus Monachus, the anonymous *Historia Norvegiae* and the anonymous *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum*. All three present brief summaries of oral traditions about the kings of Norway, in the case of Theodoricus explicitly Icelandic traditions, placed within a chronological framework and ornate with learned rhetoric and a certain amount of clerical didacticism. Theodoricus (a latinised form of Norwegian Tore) was probably identical with the late Archbishop Tore Gudmundsson or his namesake Bishop Tore of

Hamar, both of them educated at the school of St Victor in Paris. He composed his work in the Trondheim milieu in the days of Archbishop Eystein, and the author of *Ágrip* may have been connected with the same milieu. Eystein was himself the author of the extant *vita* and *miracula* of St Olaf, *Passio Olavi*, to which the later sagas of the royal saint were indebted, and there also existed in the Trondheim milieu a now lost Latin list of Norwegian kings to which Theodoricus refers (*Catalogus regum Norwagiensium*). Apart from these works most kings' sagas seem to have been written by Icelanders, sometimes in Norway or as a commission from the Norwegian court.

The first sagas written about individual kings – works that are now preserved only in fragments or in later adaptations – were at least partly of a hagiographic nature, i.e. they dealt with the lives of rulers who were believed to have either died as martyrs or fought for the Christian faith in a way that made them worthy of being remembered by the Church. *Hryggjarstykki*, preserved only as a part of later compilations, was written by a certain Eiríkr Oddsson shortly before 1170, and appears to have dealt primarily with the royal pretender Sigurd Slembe, who was tortured to death in 1139 and afterwards buried in St Mary's Church in Ålborg. It is a matter of dispute whether Eiríkr also continued his narrative up to the fall of King Inge Haraldsson in 1161. The earliest saga about St Olaf was probably composed in Iceland somewhat later or at any rate before 1200. About the same time an Icelandic monk in the monastery of Thingeyrar, Oddr Snorrason, wrote the first Latin biography of King Olaf Tryggvason, the famous Viking hero and 'Apostle of the North' who had died in battle in 1000. Another monk in the same monastery, Gunnlaugr Leifsson, is supposed to have written another Latin biography of the same king, but nothing survives of either work except for an evidently rather free translation into Old Icelandic of Oddr's text plus some isolated fragments of Gunnlaugr's version. Although the literary conventions of Latin saints' lives – and of quasi hagiographic works such as the famous *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* – can to some extent be traced in what remains of these early biographies, their hard core clearly consists of oral narratives from the skaldic tradition.

It was this indigenous narrative material that was gradually expanded and refined in the series of royal biographies that constitute the full-blown literary *konungasögur* of the thirteenth century. One of the most prominent of these large works is *Morkinskinna*, compiled about 1220, which deals with the kings after the death of St Olaf in 1030 and includes many entertaining short stories (*bættir*) about Icelanders visiting the Norwegian court. Another famous compilation is *Fagrskinna*, which was probably written in Norway in the 1220s and includes biographies of all the Norwegian kings from the early Viking

Age to the latter part of the twelfth century. *Fagrskinna* quotes more skaldic stanzas than any kings' saga apart from *Heimskringla*. It shows great interest in military activities, but is only vaguely interested in religious matters. St Olaf gets a remarkably brief treatment.

A somewhat different type of royal biography, concerned with the lives of contemporary rulers, was introduced with *Sverris saga*, written by the abbot of Thingeyrar, Karl Jónsson, begun at the instigation of King Sverre himself and concluded not long after his death in 1202. The generic model in this case was neither the saint's life – although hagiographic motifs often appear in the text – nor the skaldic anecdote but the secular biography of princes developed in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. These include lengthy rhetorical speeches, supposedly given by the hero, and towards the end a detailed description of his moral virtues, physical appearance, behaviour and social habits. Yet part of the saga is evidently based on Sverre's own autobiographical narrative, which gives the story an immediacy rarely found in Latin historiography. A similar form was later used in other sagas about contemporary rulers, for example by Sturla Thórðarson in *Hákonar saga*, probably written in the late 1260s, a work obviously based on foreign models and also on a wealth of documentary material, evidently provided by the royal chancellery.

The great classical masterpiece among the kings' sagas is *Heimskringla*, composed by Snorri Sturluson on the basis of several earlier sources at some time between 1220 and 1241. It covers all Norwegian history from mythical times to the reign of Sverre, and does so on a larger scale than any previous saga compilation. It is also more skilfully constructed than earlier *konungasögur*, integrating all the individual biographies, speeches, skaldic verses, portraits and hagiographic miracles in a tightly woven narrative web of causes and effects, which makes the work unique in European historiography. What is perhaps most remarkable is the way in which the traditional stories have been made more concrete, plausible and engaging by skilful changes in the style and narrative technique. Emotional expressions and supernatural details have largely been omitted or replaced by more factual, 'objective' language to give the account a more trustworthy appearance. Major events such as battles have been more clearly visualised by introducing precise observations about weather conditions or localities. Important scenes have been made more dramatic by presenting them in direct speech form. Although the work is in fact based on myth, legend and literary construction to a considerable degree, it gives the reader an illusion of actually witnessing historical events. A similar 'rational' tendency is also found in *Fagrskinna* but Snorri remains the master of (apparent) saga realism.

Snorri's version of the kings' sagas was so much superior to the other versions that it soon became the canonical one. Later in the thirteenth century *Knýtlinga saga*, a chronicle about the kings of Denmark, was written with *Heimskringla* as its model. The later kings' saga compilations, written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and preserved in large manuscripts such as *Flateyjarbók*, were generally based on *Heimskringla*. Material was added from other sources but only when they dealt with matters that Snorri did not mention. His work thus effectively prevented earlier versions from reaching posterity in their original form. This is one of the reasons why the exact development of *konungasögur* as a historiographic genre is now rather difficult to reconstruct.

Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* and other historical works

In Denmark the earliest historical works were also written in the twelfth century but not on the basis of skaldic tradition (of which there was evidently not much preserved outside Iceland), and the language used by the chroniclers was, for a long time, exclusively Latin. The *Roskilde Chronicle* (c. 1140) and Sven Aggesen's *Historia brevis regum Dacie* (c. 1190) prepared the way for the monumental *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus, written under the auspices of Archbishop Absalon and completed in the first decades of the thirteenth century (cf. Chapter 12(b)). This intricate and majestic history of Denmark in sixteen books, beginning with the mythical King Dan and ending with the reign of Knut IV, was based on a variety of oral and written sources, including mythical-heroic tales, Eddic poetry and early kings' sagas but also foreign chronicles and contemporary eyewitness accounts. As a literary achievement it is comparable only to *Heimskringla*, but its style and composition have little in common with the Icelandic sagas. Instead the text is modelled on the elegant rhetorical prose style of late Roman antiquity. Although Saxo praises the Icelanders for their learning and often quotes their stories, he will always amplify their terse statements into high-flown eloquence, even to the extent of transforming their Eddic verses into flawless Roman poetry in the classical style of Virgil or Horace.

Since his manner of presentation is less objective and more emotional, Saxo to modern readers appears to be less of a real historian than Snorri, but the difference between them is to a large extent one of style, not of substance. Unlike Snorri, however, Saxo preaches and editorialises just as eagerly as he reports the facts, and he does not hesitate to use mythical *fornaldarsögur* as historical sources if he can derive some appropriate philosophical moral from

the narrative. His point of view is also more aristocratic than Snorri's, closer to the court and with a more condescending attitude towards the common people. He is obviously writing for an international élite of learned men, and although his accomplished Latin prose, full of literary allusions and symbolic undertones, was exceptionally difficult to read, *Gesta Danorum* became regarded as the 'definitive' History of Denmark for several centuries, providing Shakespeare and other European writers with a treasury of memorable stories, for example that of Hamlet, the Danish prince who cunningly pretended to be a fool in order to avenge his father.

In Sweden historiography did not start until much later and then in the vernacular. Apart from some very brief chronicles of kings, bishops and lawmen, preserved in an appendix to the earliest Law of Västergötland (*Äldre Västgötalagen*, c. 1250), the most interesting texts are the so-called rhymed chronicles which, because of their poetic form, will be treated below together with the translated romances. One of the professors of Uppsala, Ericus Olai, wrote a Latin history of Sweden, *Chronica regni Gothorum*, some time before 1470, which later played an important role in the nation-building and nationalistic propaganda of the Swedish government. In reality this chronicle was a theological meditation on the role of Uppsala in salvation history as the heir of Jerusalem and Rome. Ericus Olai was the first champion of the once celebrated 'Gothic' school which held in all sincerity that Scandinavia, and particularly Sweden, was the cradle of all nations.

Sagas of Icelanders

In spite of many brilliant pieces of narrative in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* and his *Heimskringla* it is generally accepted that Icelandic narrative prose came to its peak in the sagas of Icelanders – *Íslendingasögur* – or family sagas, as they are often called. The corpus in question consists of some forty sagas or tales of considerable length, and to that number may be added many shorter narratives in a similar style, called *þættir* or strands, preserved and probably also written as parts of larger works, usually kings' sagas.

The sagas of Icelanders have only been preserved in copies that are usually much later than the original, and consequently the dating of the originals is problematic and under constant revision. The majority of the sagas, including most of the best known, must have been composed in the thirteenth century, before and after the end of the Free State Period, but at least a third were composed in the fourteenth century.

The sagas of Icelanders are set in the period from the settlement into the first half of the eleventh century. The conflicts are of a personal nature, when seen from a modern point of view, but settlement and Christianisation loom large in the background as events of national significance and even mythic dimensions.

The sagas of Icelanders are written as history, i.e. they refer to historical personages, events known to be historical, with actions which take place in real geography, mainly in Iceland. Much of the narrative, however, is of such a kind that its truthfulness cannot be verified and may even seem of little consequence to a modern reader. For two hundred years scholars have been disputing the relationship of these literary texts to oral tradition and historical reality as well as their elements of pure fiction. A moderate view shared by many scholars today is that most of these sagas have a historical core and draw on oral tradition and traditional storytelling while the large form and means of composition are a literary development, and that an author is responsible for the final form as well as many elements in the story, some of them his own creation. This gives large scope for disagreement, and there is indeed great variation in the opinion of individual scholars about different sagas. The idea that they are more or less 'true' stories faithfully told and retold by generations of tellers of tales has been abandoned, while hardly anyone denies that they must be based on oral tradition to some extent. Their world view, sets of values, types of conflicts, and ways of solving them, have in recent years increasingly attracted the attention of historians and anthropologists, while their narrative art continues to fascinate students of literature and general readers.

The sagas of Icelanders are different from most or all medieval literature in dealing with what appear to be the private feuds and skirmishes of freeholding farmers. The protagonists may, however, even if they are farmers at home, mix with kings when abroad, and they belong to a chieftain class with some aristocratic traits and aspirations, above all a strong sense of individual and family honour. Although the feuds are private in nature, seen from a modern point of view, they affect the power balance in the uppermost layer of society, among *goðar* (Chapter 8(d)) and other leaders. There is no clear demarcation of a private as opposed to a public sphere of life in saga society, but there is a generally recognised distinction between events that are accessible to 'common knowledge' and events that are not. Sagas of Icelanders purport to report only events of the former kind and present them as they were understood by 'general opinion' in the neighbourhood.

With some notable exceptions the typical saga opens with an account of the forefathers of the main figures, their origin in Norway, and events leading to emigration and settlement in Iceland. The main characters usually belong to the second or later generations of Icelanders, and crucial events take place in the last decades of the tenth century or at the very beginning of the eleventh. Conflicts are usually set in motion by disputes about everyday matters, pieces of land, indecent behaviour towards an unmarried woman, personal insults, or other kinds of aggression. The motives may initially be economical, emotional (attraction to a woman), or a wish to demonstrate strength, but any challenge to the authority or personal rights of a free man of honour demands a proper reaction if honour is not to be transferred to the challenger.

The society described in the sagas has diverse ways of dealing with such conflicts. When arising among people with little influence they may either be settled by a chieftain or be taken over by two opposing chieftains. Cases may be settled through arbitration or in court, but a party who considers himself to be dishonoured must restore his honour through either compensation or revenge. It is of course the constant threat of blood revenge and the willingness to risk one's life for honour that heightens the pathos of the sagas. Each saga usually consists of a web of feuds with many attempted reconciliations, but in the end all feuds have been resolved, and a new balance reigns.

Although it has been maintained, correctly, that feud is at the core of the sagas, the best of them far exceed the limitations of a plain feud story, and the heroic spirit of the old lays, which is revived in the best sagas, is softened and humanised in their fabric. The sagas are interwoven with mundane details of the life of the farmers that inhabit them, and at the same time a certain humanistic spirit, somehow connected with the Christian faith of the authors, deepens the psychology of the characters and makes their tragedies closer to a modern reader than the old heroic lays. In *Njáls saga*, the longest and most impressive of all sagas, the brave and heroic Gunnar, who is the protagonist of the first half of the saga, expresses his loathing of manslaughter, but yet the demands of honour force him into a situation where he has to kill a number of enemies and is in the end greatly outnumbered and killed. His older friend, the wise Njáll, employs all his wisdom and legal skills in an attempt to ensure peace around him and save his own kin from the fate that awaited Gunnar, but fate, or an evil with roots in human character spreading through society like contagious disease, is stronger than human will, and the house of Njáll and his family is consumed in a fire described with symbolic and apocalyptic overtones. The narrative concludes, however, in a reconciliation that suggests the beginning of a more peaceful era.

The scope of *Njáls saga* allows it to include much that is characteristic of the sagas of Icelanders: a multitude of clearly drawn and memorable figures, male and female; a fascinating dialogue full of irony and poignant phrases; great fighters and large fights; evil strife-mongers with some redeeming traits as well as good men with fatal shortcomings. Other sagas are less complicated and their ethos less distinct. *Egils saga* portrays a forceful Viking embodying the contradictions of the Viking Age: one day a brutal killer, another day brilliant poet and even a healer of sickness, and a third day an industrious and thrifty farmer. *Egils saga* differs from other sagas of Icelanders in that most of its action takes place outside Iceland, and Egil and his forefathers have a long feud with the royal family of Norway; a feud which the farmers obviously cannot win, but in which they hold their own to a remarkable and unlikely degree. While characterisation and plotting in *Njáls saga* is tragic and clearly coloured by Christian views, Egil is at least partly a comic character, described with both irony and a sort of hard-boiled admiration as he is dying helpless on his sickbed in old age. The poetry ascribed to him and incorporated into the saga demonstrates a problematic character with a depth of feeling and strength of passion unsurpassed in the literature of his time.

Egils saga is a biography in structure with a long introduction about the protagonist's forefathers. *Laxdæla saga*, on the other hand, depicts the destinies of three generations of a great chieftain family. Increasing internal conflicts within the family come to a crisis when erotic jealousy is added to fierce ambitions and pride, and the family is destroyed by a series of mutual killings of cousins and fosterbrothers, which is quite clearly modelled on the heroic lays about the Burgundians and the Nibelungs. An even darker tragedy is related in *Gísla saga*, the story of an excellent man, who, by the merciless demands of the duty of honouring one's word, is driven to kill his brother-in-law in the arms of his own sister, and is subsequently outlawed, persecuted and eventually killed through the instigation of another brother-in-law. In spite of the tragic spirit dominating this saga, it is full of comic relief and lively detail which enlivens its sad picture of outlawry.

An outlaw even more colourful than Gísli is described in *Grettis saga*, composed in the fourteenth century and the last of the truly great sagas. Its theme is that physical excellence does not bring luck. Grettir is witty and exceptionally strong, and, like his predecessor Beowulf, with whose story *Grettis saga* shares a number of motifs, he has a gift for cleansing the land of monsters, but he cannot control his temper. This fault as well as his hubris bring him misfortune, and he has to live as an outlaw until he is finally betrayed, outnumbered and killed along with a faithful brother. Grettir has the sympathy

of the narrative in spite of many obvious faults, but he is born in the wrong period, after Christianisation, and the tale of his existence on the borders of society, as outcast and defender in one person, has a tragic undertone in spite of many entertaining and adventurous episodes.

Most sagas of Icelanders are not as artful as the ones mentioned above, but they generally give a solid impression of tough reliability, a quality that is clearly dependent on their terse and seemingly objective narrative style with preference for understatement and dry humour. Although their world is remote from that of the modern reader, their preoccupation with the basic and essential conditions of life make the sagas easily accessible and understandable.

It seems plausible that educated chieftains such as Snorri Sturluson, who had acquired a taste for written stories through their acquaintance with saints' legends and kings' sagas as well as translated romance, initiated the writing of sagas of Icelanders. They certainly must have realised the possibilities inherent in the narrative tradition about the feuds and fates of their forefathers, and saga-writers had by this time learned how to combine oral tales with literary composition on a large scale. In some cases, such as *Laxdæla saga*, the noble descent, dignity and aristocratic lifestyle of the protagonists is emphasised while other sagas make no great effort to imitate stories about kings and aristocrats. In many cases it is easy to believe in the general picture of life drawn in the less glorifying sagas, and they could easily be composed on the basis of oral tales with no great filling in of fictional detail, although one must assume that the dialogue is mainly the work of the authors. From the very beginning, for example in *Egils saga*, there is much that is unrealistic and adventurous in the sagas of Icelanders, reminiscent of the mythical-heroic sagas. However, this element is much stronger in sagas assumed to be written in the fourteenth century. Moreover, such sagas naturally show less knowledge of how the old society functioned and are in general more fantastic.

It is hardly a coincidence that the sagas of Icelanders came into being in a time when an old form of society was dissolving and a new one was coming into being, in a time when questions of basic values and identity must have pressed themselves upon the Icelandic chieftain class.

In the dramatic period in the history of Iceland when the best known sagas were written – the thirteenth century – a number of sagas about recent events were also composed. More or less historical sagas were composed about a number of bishops, some of whom were considered to be saints, and the political struggles of the chieftain class were recorded in a few sagas later gathered into one collection named *Sturlunga saga* after the most influential family. The most important author of the Sturlunga sagas was Sturla Thórðarson,

Snorri's nephew, who was active as skald, historiographer and learned in law at the Norwegian court. These contemporary sagas are overburdened with factual information because of their proximity to the events they describe, but the artistry of the best saga-writers appears in characterisation and in many individual episodes. Sturla Thórðarson is indisputably one of the foremost Icelandic authors of the period.

Fornaldarsögur and romances

In the 1220s King Hákon Hákonsson is said to have commissioned the translation of chivalric romances into Norse, including Thomas' version of *Tristan* and several of the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. This initiative was evidently part of a general royal campaign to introduce French – or Anglo-Norman – courtly manners and aristocratic culture in the kingdom of Norway, most clearly evidenced in *Konungs skuggsiá*, the 'King's Mirror' (c. 1260, cf. Chapter 14). It took the form of an educational treatise in dialogue form, laying down rules for proper behaviour at court and outlining the duties of the sovereign and his entourage, as well as giving much general and practical information, often in the form of didactic narrative *exempla*. Although *Konungs skuggsiá* belongs to a well-known medieval genre and is clearly dependent on Latin and French models, it has been adapted to the specific nature of the Norse *hirð* and to the traditions of thirteenth-century Norway. Its Swedish equivalent, *Um styrilse konunga ok höfðinga* (On the government of kings and chieftains, c. 1340; cf. Chapters 12(d) and 14), is a much less original text. Both works, however, are good examples of the political literature encouraged by medieval rulers in order to further the ideals of chivalry, vassalage and royalism.

One of the earliest and most influential prose translations of a narrative promoting such ideals is *Karlamagnús saga*, an extensive compilation based on French *chansons de geste* and on the Latin *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, but arranged in such a way as to form a continuous biography of Charlemagne. *Þiðreks saga af Bern* is a similar compilation, based on Low German epic lays about Theoderic the Great and other Germanic heroes. Both these works may to some extent be compared to the *konungasögur*, and they have preserved narrative material that no longer exists in their original French or German form; hence they are important not only in the history of Scandinavian literature but also in the study of Chanson de Roland and Nibelungenlied. Among the more courtly and romantic translations, *Strengleikar* or *Ljóðabók* (cf. Chapter 14) – which includes the short lays of Marie de France – deserves to be mentioned as well as the *Saga af Tristram ok Isönd* (Tomas' *Tristan*), *Ívents saga* (Chrétien's *Yvain*),

Elís saga ok Rósamundu, *Partalópa saga* (*Partanopeus de Blois*), and *Mágus saga jarls* (*Quatre fils Aimon*).

These translations were influential in several different respects. First of all, they seem to have had an impact on the earliest recording in Iceland of *fornaldarsögur*, the mythical-heroic sagas about early Norse and Germanic heroes. Secondly, the translations inspired the original composition of new *rid-darasögur*, prose romances in saga style, which combined the chivalric themes of French and German verse narrative with traditional Norse folklore material. Thirdly, a new and more aristocratic lifestyle spread with the romance from Norway all over the Scandinavian world, giving rise to a new aristocratic rhetoric in the vernacular and to new courtly genres, such as the rhymed chronicle and the Scandinavian ballad.

The earliest *fornaldarsögur* were based on old poems and tales going back to a far Scandinavian past. They make an impression quite different from Chrétien's refined poetry. However, both genres share an element of the exotic and fantastic. When the Icelanders began to compose new and entirely fictional sagas of adventure or romance in the fourteenth century, the distinction gradually disappeared, although setting and certain clichés can be used to distinguish between romances of the North and South. Such romances were created in great quantities in Iceland from the fourteenth century to the end of the Middle Ages.

The term *fornaldarsaga* ('saga of antiquity') designates a narrative of mythical and legendary kings and heroes of the North, some of whom also appear in Old English and German poetry. In mainland Scandinavia the same tradition is most strongly represented in Saxo, although parts of his legends derive from Icelandic tradition. In the late Middle Ages and even after the Reformation this tradition survived in the form of Scandinavian ballads and Icelandic *rímur*. The oldest of the *fornaldarsögur*, *Völsunga saga*, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Örvar Odds saga*, present their heroic and often tragic stories in a mixture of prose and Eddic verse, even as prosimetrum in certain sections. They are tales of action with a strong supernatural element, although it is human strength, physical and moral, and human fate which is the focus of interest.

Some of these sagas contain old tragic motifs, especially *Völsunga saga* with its paraphrase of the Eddic poems about the Nibelungs and the sagas about legendary Danish kings, Ragnar Lodbrok and Hrolfr kraki (Regnarus and Rollo in Saxo). In these sagas we find the classical motifs of tragedy, incest, rivalry and bloody revenge among in-laws and even siblings. One of the prototypes is the lonely wanderer Örvar Odd, who is involved in innumerable battles, wins

unlikely victories, but is never at rest and loses more in his struggles than he gains. A popular and optimistic trend, partly there from the beginning, comes to dominate this genre. Its heroes, having fought and been victorious against giants and human adversaries, end by gaining a princess and kingship. These sagas are written in a straightforward and forceful saga style plainer and more popular than the style of the kings' sagas and the best sagas of Icelanders, and their composition is simple, a series of adventures of a similar kind leading generally to a happy end.

In Sweden and Denmark, no *fornaldarsögur* have been preserved in the native language, although there is evidence that at least some of the narrative material once existed in the oral tradition (as evidenced by picture stones, runic inscriptions and chronicles). Verse romances, however, were introduced in Sweden at the instigation of the Norwegian Queen Eufemia at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The three so-called *Eufemiavisor* – *Herr Ivan lejonriddaren*, *Flores och Blanzeflor*, and *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* – were at least partly based on Norwegian models but composed, like the French originals, in narrative verse, the so-called *knittel*, which soon became the generally accepted epic metre in east Scandinavia. From Sweden the verse romances spread to Denmark in the fifteenth century, primarily as Danish adaptations of the *Eufemiavisor*. Prose versions of the Norse material concerning Charlemagne also spread through both Denmark and Sweden.

Verse chronicles, presenting recent historical events in the same style and with the same narrative technique as the versified romances, were written in both Sweden and Denmark, especially towards the end of the Middle Ages. The earliest and by far the best of these chronicles is the Swedish *Erikskrönikan* (c. 1325, cf. Chapters 12(d) and 14), which gives a dramatic account of King Birger Magnusson's murder of his two brothers in the castle of Nyköping in 1317, evidently modelled on the traditional Germanic myth told in *Piðreks saga* about the tragic death of the Nibelungen. Later chronicles, such as the Swedish *Karlskrönikan* (c. 1450) and the Danish *Rimkrøniken* (c. 1477), are much inferior in form and seem to have been used primarily for propaganda purposes. At this time, the romances and the chronicles were no longer the exclusive property of a refined and aristocratic court but had evidently 'declined' to the level of townspeople, traders and mercenaries in the service of military leaders.

In Iceland a great number of 'new' romances were composed in the late Middle Ages under the influence of translated chivalric romances and *fornaldarsögur*. These compositions draw on the stock of motifs and structures found in older romances. Their tales are either set in the exotic South and East and given such chivalric flavour as their authors could manage, or in

the adventurous North, in which cases Viking voyages, breaking of grave mounds, and fighting against giantesses are among the preferred motifs. One of the favoured tale-types in both cases is the adventurous bridal quest. These tales are lively and entertaining, and their origin no doubt lies in the Icelandic gentry who were eager to escape from the monotony of their rural existence. The popularity of the matter of romance is also reflected in the fact that most of them were retold in metrical form as *rímur*.

Ballads and *rímur*

The Icelandic *rímur*, long narrative poems in intricate stanza forms, originated in the fourteenth century and were composed in great quantities during the fifteenth century and later. While early ballads may have inspired the creators of this genre, it has much more in common with the metrical romances of Britain and Germany. Ballads probably became popular in Scandinavia at approximately the same time as the *rímur*, but much less is known of the medieval form of the ballads. Almost without exception *rímur* cycles are based on prose sagas, retelling them in a somewhat abbreviated form without any changes in the plot. Each *ríma* is introduced with a lyric address to the ladies of the audience in a courtly fashion. The *rímur* poets make use of a simplified skaldic diction, and their creativity finds expression in endless variation of the basic metres and rhyme-schemes.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century thousands of versions of ballads that had been circulating in oral tradition were recorded in the Nordic countries. Although the dating of individual ballads is problematic, the genre as such obviously belongs to the Middle Ages, and traces can be found from the early fourteenth century.

The closest metrical and stylistic parallels to the ballads found in medieval poetry are a few French songs included in romances and supposed to be popular in origin. The ballad 'world' is indisputably chivalric in nature, and both these characteristics make it natural to see the Scandinavian ballad as part of the wave of chivalric culture that flowed from France to the north and west of Europe in the high Middle Ages. With the very limited material at hand it is impossible to trace the routes of this influence in detail, they may indeed have been many. The ballad form might have found its way to Scandinavia through Germany or Britain or directly from France, and its first stops might have been the houses of the Danish aristocracy – where collection was begun and where ballads were found in great numbers in the late sixteenth century – or, as has been recently and forcibly argued, the royal court of Norway – which before

and after 1300 was a vital centre for the transmission of chivalric culture to Scandinavia.

The Scandinavian ballads have two basic stanza forms, which also dominate British balladry and are undoubtedly medieval in origin: (i) the 'ballad quatrain' with four plus three beats in each half and rhyme at the end of lines two and four, and a short refrain accompanying each stanza; and (ii) a couplet with four beats in each line accompanied by a refrain which most often is 'split', i.e. its first and shorter half is inserted between the lines of the couplet while the second half, one line or more, follows the couplet. The rhythms are free, and there are some variations: the lines of the couplet are sometimes repeated, partly or in full, and this affects the form of the refrain; also, the number of beats in each half of the quatrain may be reduced to six. The ballad was a song, and many of the tunes have been preserved. In Føroyar ballad-singing is still the most popular accompaniment to a traditional ring-dance, and dancing is frequently referred to in the ballad refrains; therefore it is commonly believed that ballads were danced to all over Scandinavia in medieval times.

The Scandinavian ballad is characterised by a strong narrative element while the refrains furnish them with a lyrical quality. They tell simple but dramatic stories of love and heroic adventure with few and standardised characters presented in loosely connected scenes with much dialogue. The style is highly formulaic, and the formulas have been characterised as 'epic', i.e. they are used to identify important actors and advance the story, rather than as ornamentation.

When the ballad corpus of Scandinavia is surveyed in its entirety without regard to the age of individual poems, which seldom can be ascertained in any case, there are strong common traits everywhere, but also some important regional differences. Scholarship divides the Scandinavian ballads into categories according to matter and style. The largest category is the *riddervise*, the chivalric or knightly ballad, which tells a story of love, sometimes revenge, set in aristocratic surroundings. These ballads are usually rather short, built around a central scene or scenes of confrontation. *Ballads of the supernatural* are usually similar in style and even setting, and their protagonists are human; but supernatural elements, most frequently elves or trolls, play a crucial part in the plot as enticing but dangerous lovers or enemies. A group of ballads which is frequently set among the common people, *legendary ballads*, include motifs from Christian legend; saints or the Virgin Mary participate directly in the action and miracles take place. The stories of *jocular ballads* also frequently take place among the common people, although their dealings with the clergy or

the aristocracy may be the theme. These ballads often have themes in common with *fabliaux* or medieval *exempla*. They mock stupidity, greed and any transgression of the norms of sexual behaviour, such as excessive sexual appetite of a woman or an 'abnormal' reticence of a young male. The hen-pecked and cuckolded husband is also a popular motif.

The categories or sub-genres mentioned are found all over Scandinavia from Swedish Finland to Føroyar and Iceland; some traces have even been discovered in the Norse or 'norn' language in Shetland. Danish and Swedish aristocratic tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is richest, contains most types and variants, and probably gives the best impression of the character of this poetry as it was in the Middle Ages. Although the narration is swift and scenic, these variants often contain a coherence of plot and a fullness of detail that gives them a strong impression of 'reality'.

The world of the ballads is characterised by strong feelings of love and hate, and emotions are as a rule immediately turned into action. Ebbe Skammelssøn comes home from court to find his brother about to marry his (Ebbe's) fiancée. Furious, he kills them both and afterwards wanders around the land as an outlaw. In another ballad, Torben is working in the fields when a young man comes and kills him in revenge for a kinsman. The killer announces the deed to Torben's daughter and falls in love with her. She takes him as compensation and they ride away together. And in another story, while old Ebbe is away in Rome preparing for his death, the sons of Iver come and rape his daughters. They tell the news to their father when he returns, but when he cannot avenge their shame, they take on men's clothes and kill the sons of Iver, refusing to accept their offer of marriage in reconciliation.

Among the most popular of the ballads of the supernatural is the one about Olaf and the elves. Olaf is riding in the forest with invitations to his wedding when he meets an elf-maiden (a previous lover) who wants to dance with him. When he declines, she strikes him, and he rides home and dies in his mother's arms. There are also romantic ballads where the impediments to the realisation of love are easily overcome. Seen as a whole the ballads give an extremely rich and varied, even if highly stylised, picture of life among the rural aristocracy of Scandinavia. Ballads of this kind have been popular also where their social background is more foreign as in the rural areas of Norway, Føroyar and Iceland.

So-called *heroic* or *champion ballads* stand apart. Their theme is usually the victorious hero who fears nothing and conquers all, his numerous adversaries including giants and monsters, and often ends up gaining a wife and a kingdom. The tales are often episodic and the poems longer than is common in the

other categories. Hyperbole is the most frequently used stylistic device and can be contrasted with the understatement common in the *riddervise*. The heroic ballads often have a literary background and take their stories from *fornaldarsögur* and translated romances as well as from heroic poetry and popular legend. This sub-genre has been recorded in great numbers in Føroyar and was productive there into the nineteenth century. The most famous ballad cycle of the Føroyar Islanders is the '*Sjúrðar kvæði*', the poems about Sigurd the dragon-slayer, Brynhild and the Nibelungs. The poems draw mainly on *Völsunga saga*, but there seem to be some independent links with medieval German tradition. Many of the heroic ballads recorded in Føroyar have parallels elsewhere in Scandinavia, and the Norwegian ones are usually most closely related. This sub-genre is probably Norwegian in origin but has spread from Norway to other Scandinavian countries where it was well received, except in Iceland where singers preferred to treat heroic themes in the more elevated *rímur* style.

Latin religious literature

The Catholic Church produced religious texts in Latin of the same genres everywhere, above all prayers and poems for official use in the liturgy (rhymed offices and formulas for the mass) in praise of local saints and relics. There were in all thirty-six such local rhymed offices in use in Scandinavia at the end of the Middle Ages. By far the most popular Nordic saint was the martyr King Olaf of Norway (d. 1030). His cult spread rapidly all over Scandinavia, England and northern Europe (the oldest liturgical witness being the 'Red Book of Darley', diocese of Sherborne, c. 1060). His legend, *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, probably originated in the eleventh century but we have seen that the earliest extant version was composed in the twelfth century by Archbishop Eystein of Trondheim (d. 1188). An accomplished master of rhyme offices was Bishop Brynolf Algotsson of Skara (d. 1317). In his *Office of the Crown of Thorns*, he used rhymes, assonances, alliteration and puns to enhance the paradoxical effects: the twining of the Crown seems to be expressed by the intertwining of such literary artifices.

In the same vein, Jacobus Nicholai of Roskilde in Denmark excelled even more in rhymes, puns and allusions to sacred and profane history. His *Salutacio beate Marie*, written about 1350 in praise of the Virgin Mary, originally comprised 150 couplets (some of which are now lost) and thus formed a poetic counterpart of the Psalter. In his didactic poem on Death, *Liber de distinctione metrorum*, composed in 1363, he displays an architectonic virtuosity in handling both his

subject and Latin verse. Part of the poem is written in geometrical figures, where the letter M (for *Mors*, 'death') is the starting and the terminating point of the verses.

An original and impressive contribution to religious instruction is the immense didactic poem *Hexaameron* composed by Archbishop Andreas Sunesen (d. 1228) of Lund. Being a condensed version of Creation theology according to recent scholarly debates (it draws much from Stephen Langton), it consists of 8,040 hexametric verses and was meant to serve the training of schoolboys in both Christianity and Latin. Another summary of theology is the *Rotulus pugillaris* by Augustinus de Dacia, a Danish (or possibly Swedish) Dominican (d. 1285), which is famous at least for its well-known formula of the four senses of Scripture in medieval exegesis: *littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quid speres anagogia* (the literal sense is about history, the spiritual sense is about dogma, the moral sense about human acts, the anagogical sense ('leading upwards') is about heaven, the ultimate goal of man's hopes).

A contemporary of Augustinus and a fellow Dominican was Petrus de Dacia (d. 1289), usually called Sweden's first author. His letters to Christina, a German beguine whom he had met in the village of Stommeln outside Cologne, are an interesting example of medieval self-introspection. His biography of Christina, who was vexed by different psychical and physical torments, is a blend of sensualism and intellectualism. Petrus considers Christina a proof of the theological principle that grace does not destroy but ennoble nature. The sublime truths he had learnt by the book, he sees incarnated in the holy woman.

The most remarkable and influential of Swedish intellectuals was Master Mathias Övedsson, canon of Linköping, Sweden, a theologian trained in Paris (d. 1350) and the first confessor of St Birgitta. Mathias dedicated himself to sacred rhetoric. He wrote three great works to serve preachers in their task of making the Christian faith more relevant and attractive to their audiences. Mathias is both systematic (he is fond of cross-references) and eloquent, with a personal, effortless Latin style. Only fragments remain of probably some 1,400 pages in abbreviated script of a huge concordance of the Bible. There he explains biblical concepts as well as parts of natural philosophy, not out of an interest in nature itself but as a code of moral attitudes to be pursued or avoided. His *Homo conditus* is one long sermon, beginning with Creation and ending in the Last Judgement. Depending on the day, the preacher could cut any part of it and make it his own, with the help of a subtle system of letters in the margin. Mathias also is the author of a commentary on the Apocalypse of St John (*Expositio super Apocalypsim*), which was read and appreciated by

Nicolaus Cusanus, and it was to be the main doctrinal source of the famous ‘apostle of Italy’, the Franciscan preacher Bernardino of Siena in the next century.

Mathias was engaged in commenting on the Apocalypse when his *confessante*, Birgitta Birgersdotter (d. 1373), received her first ‘celestial revelations’, the title of her collected messages, translated into Latin and brought together to serve the cause of her canonisation, which followed in 1391. St Birgitta is, by any standards, one of the most remarkable authors in medieval Scandinavia. She belonged to the high aristocracy and was the mother of eight children. After the death of her husband in 1344 she became the recipient of heavenly messages not only of mystical or even religious character but also concerning political and practical matters. An analysis of the *Revelations* shows that her extensive and intense Bible reading must have provided her with the fundamental structural elements of her inner world, the archetypal stage, a scenario, a set of typical scenes, actors and dialogues, as well as typical addressees of her message. She identifies herself with the Bride (Revelation 22:17) and calls herself *canalis*, a ‘channel’ of the Holy Spirit. Birgitta was deeply imbued with biblical language, imagery and frames of thought, and she has used a wealth of metaphors to drive home her message. In the vein of the Old Testament prophets, she addressed prelates, popes and kings with harsh criticism. In 1349 she settled in Rome, where she entreated the pope in Avignon to return to the see in Rome.

She also conceived detailed plans for a new monastic order (the Order of Our Saviour, later called the Bridgettines), including a rule according to which sisters and brothers would live in the same monastery under the supervision of a common abbess. Birgitta died before the first monastery was erected in 1384, in Vadstena, central Sweden. It was to endure half a century after the Protestant reformation, until 1595, which is in itself a proof of its prestige as a pilgrimage centre and the spiritual heart of late medieval Sweden. The order was soon established in all of Europe. The weekly Office of the Virgin, composed by St Birgitta and her confessor Master Petrus Olavi of Skänninge, to be used by the sisters of the order, is beyond doubt the most original contribution to theology made by a Scandinavian. It is in fact a complete treatise, written in an exalted style, on Mary’s personal role in the salvation of man.

Some 500 manuscripts (including over 12,000 sermons) produced or used in Vadstena are still extant in the Uppsala University Library. One of the monks, Olavus Johannis Gutho, was a former student of the newly established university of Uppsala. His lecture notes (in seven volumes) offer thorough and precious insights into academic life on the outskirts of Christendom on the

eve of Reformation, when the attraction of different philosophical schools had ceased and education had been transformed into a standard curriculum of, by then, uncontroversial texts.

Religious literature in the vernacular

The medieval religious literature of Norway and Iceland is massive, but it has received much less scholarly attention than secular literature. Much of it has still not been satisfactorily edited, and research has been limited. A large proportion of the texts are *heilagra manna sögur* – saints' lives in prose – but there is also a wealth of poetry from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries. In the beginning religious themes appear in skaldic praise poems about saintly kings, but quickly the poets begin to praise Christ and later to treat legendary material in skaldic measures. From the twelfth century we still have the *drápa Geisli* (ray) by the priest Einar Skúlason, a magnificent praise poem of St Olaf, recited to kings and archbishops in the cathedral of Nidaros in the 1150s; *Harmsól* (sorrow's sun) is a meek poem of repentance and prayer by the canon Gamli in Thykkvabær, and *Placitus drápa* is an account of the legend of St Eustace in a difficult kenning style.

In the thirteenth century religious poetry gradually freed itself of the intricacies of skaldic style, and to that century we date the didactic and visionary poem *Sólarljóð* (sun-song), in Eddic measure, where a dead father describes the other world to his son. His description of death bathed in the rays of the sun that is Christ, his mysticism and apocalyptic images inspired by the Bible, make the poem the most original religious work of the Icelandic Middle Ages. Even more impressive, however, is the great fourteenth-century *drápa*, *Lilja* (lily), a poem of 100 stanzas in skaldic metre telling the universal story of Creation, Fall and Redemption.

The poet of *Lilja* programmatically abstains from the use of kennings and replaces them with classical rhetorical devices and Christian symbolism. The composition is symmetrical, with the death of Christ precisely at the centre of the poem. Praise is divided between Christ and Mary, and in the final quarter narrative yields to lyric praise and prayer. The rhythms and images of *Lilja* resounded in Icelandic religious poetry to the end of the Middle Ages and even later, but the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries also saw the creation of a great number of hymns and religious songs in easy rhymed metres.

Compared to this poetry religious prose is closer to the common heritage of the Church. There is a great amount preserved; homilies are found in both Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts, but the bulk of the translated prose

works is now preserved in Icelandic manuscripts. Parts of the Old Testament, with a commentary based mainly on *Historia scholastica* and *Speculum historiale*, are found in *Stjórn*, an Icelandic manuscript the text of which is at least partly of Norwegian origin. In addition there are the numerous saints' lives, legends of the apostles, legends of St Mary, etc., as well as a number of works of a more philosophical or scholarly nature.

The religious and learned literature found in Icelandic and Norwegian medieval manuscripts is remarkable for its quantity and variety which demonstrate the solid education and wide interests of the clergy. The translations are also a remarkable feat from a literary point of view. The style is very simple in the oldest texts, but in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries new trends emerge characterised by a much more ornate and even florid style. The importance of the religious writings in the creation of a literary language is indisputable, and some scholars even believe that the much praised saga style may owe more to the *sermo humilis* of the clergy than to the oral style of sagamen, tellers of tales.

In eastern Scandinavia religious literature was usually not written in the vernacular at all, but some texts of this kind, translated from Latin or from other European languages and probably intended for the edification of nuns or laymen, have been preserved in medieval manuscripts. Included among them, for example, are a Danish *Mariaklage* (complaint of Mary) from around 1300, a Danish collection of saints' lives, *Hellige Kvinder* (holy women) from the fifteenth century, and a Swedish collection of exempla, *Siælinna thrøst* (consolation of the soul) translated around 1420 in Vadstena from a Low German original.

Late medieval literature

West Scandinavian literature declined towards the end of the Middle Ages, when both Iceland and Norway came to share a king with Denmark. The north Atlantic centres of culture, which in the thirteenth century had produced the classical Old Norse masterpieces, lost their strength and independence, gradually becoming more provincial. Meanwhile, the literary activities of the two expanding kingdoms of east Scandinavia became increasingly prominent. They also became increasingly centred in the capitals of København and Stockholm or in prominent places of learning such as Vadstena. The founding of the first universities in the 1470s as well as the introduction of the printing press in the 1480s strongly contributed to this process of cultural centralisation in the Danish and Swedish kingdoms.

As in most other European countries secular narrative towards the end of the Middle Ages lost some of its aristocratic refinement and sometimes incorporated grotesque or 'carnavalesque' adventures, folksy jokes, and satirical or even obscene elements. This tendency is obvious in late Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* and *rímur* as well as in Danish ballads and in late Swedish rhymed chronicles and prose romances. It is also evident in a Swedish satire from the end of the fifteenth century, *Skämtan om abbotar* (joke about abbots), which, in an innocent adaptation of an English twelfth-century satire, makes fun of monastic gluttony and pious hypocrisy. Most of these late works, however, are fairly simple and artless; there is nothing that can be compared to the novellas of Boccaccio or Chaucer.

Nor is there a medieval drama in Scandinavia that can be compared to the farce or the secular morality play of France or England. At the very end of our period there are some attempts in Denmark and Sweden to introduce religious drama, most remarkably in the form of one miracle play, *Ludus de sancto Kanuto duce*, presumably performed around 1500 at the church of Ringsted in Denmark, and one mystery play about Resurrection, *Ludus resurrectionis*, performed by clerical teachers and schoolboys in the Swedish town of Söderköping (1506). But the development of drama as regular public entertainment does not really start in Scandinavia until after the Reformation.

The classical literature of medieval Scandinavia may thus appear to confirm a commonly held British opinion that the literary art of the Nordic countries is primarily one of 'doom and gloom' within a strict and austere form: works like *Njáls saga*, *Sólarljóð*, the *Ballad of Ebbe Skammelssøn*, or the *Revelations of St Birgitta*. Those who take the trouble to acquaint themselves more than superficially with this literature will undoubtedly discover a much more varied picture. Yet it may be fair to say that the greatest literary classics of medieval Scandinavia were either heroic narratives of epic scope or visionary, mythical texts based on some kind of religious imagery.

Art and architecture

ANNA NILSÉN

That art and architecture depend on and reflect the society in which they are produced is clearly evident in the Middle Ages. Prosperous times are favourable to activities such as building and adorning, while in periods of depression efforts in these fields decrease. A good example is the negative effect of the plague epidemics from the mid-fourteenth century, which affected all aspects of society and put an end to the grandiose high medieval era in art. Big projects, such as the building of the cathedral in Uppsala, could not be pursued at the same pace as before or came to a stand-still, sometimes permanently. This does not mean that nothing happened in art and architecture in the second half of the fourteenth century, but the projects were mostly on a smaller scale than previously, though there were exceptions such as Vadstena Abbey, founded in 1370. The convent buildings of Vadstena were consecrated in 1384 and the construction of the church took place in the last quarter of the fourteenth century and the first decades of the fifteenth.

The difficult times of the fourteenth century are also reflected in the visual arts. This is particularly evident in the representations of Christ. Even if the suffering of Christ was expressed in different ways earlier, there had been no predilection for depicting extreme suffering of the type that was preferred in the fourteenth and most of the fifteenth century.

One could imagine that a period of political unrest, for instance the fifteenth century in Sweden, would also be negative for the creation of art and architecture, but this was not the case. In Sweden, Finland and Denmark this was a rich period, at least as regards pictorial art; as for architecture, the nobility of the late Middle Ages were more interested in fortifying their strongholds than in building churches.

Medieval works of art rarely provide examples of straightforward political propaganda, though they may sometimes reflect the power, piety or wealth of their donor. Most of what remains is sacral in the sense that it consists mainly of churches and ecclesiastical art objects; there are very few vestiges

of secular buildings and their decorations. But delight in decoration is evident from the amount of decorated tools in museums throughout Scandinavia. Profane art objects have not been treated with the same reverence as sacral ones. They were used until worn out and then replaced. Buildings were re-built successively, and building material was constantly re-used. Fashions and styles may have mattered more in the secular than in the sacral sphere, but even in the latter an outdated object could be radically brought up to date. In the fifteenth century more than one Romanesque statue of a virgin had her head recarved – or even cut off and replaced with a more fashionable one.

Trade and art thrived together in the Middle Ages. Along the old European trade routes buildings and art objects bear testimony to former cultural exchange. However, cultural impulses rarely went out from the Nordic countries; Scandinavia was to a high degree at the receiving end.

Sometimes art objects or buildings are the sole evidence of bygone, better times; Gotland is an excellent example of this. The high Middle Ages, when the rural islanders still carried on their profitable trade, was an era of unprecedented building activity. New chancels replaced the small Romanesque ones and new naves and towers followed, mostly in majestic dimensions. When bad times set in from the mid-fourteenth century, with pestilence and war, building stopped and many of the churches have remained as they were left at that time, some with a low Romanesque nave as a link between a high Gothic chancel and a Romanesque or sometimes Gothic tower (Plate 23); they thus reflect the economic collapse of their builders. In some places in the countryside medieval dwelling houses, built in stone and several storeys high, bear witness to the heyday of Gotland (Plate 24). In Fide church there is a painting of the Man of Sorrows over which a versified text relates a story of devastated land and burned farmsteads. A chronogram gives us the year: 1361, the very year when the Danish king Valdemar Atterdag conquered the island and its peasant levy was killed almost to the last man. The fifteenth century was to be a period of decline for Gotland.

Pilgrimage was also important for art, especially in the high Middle Ages, leading to prosperity for many a place which was lucky enough to attract pilgrims or could provide them with lodging along the road. The foremost Scandinavian example is Trondheim in Norway, where St Olaf rested in his shrine in the cathedral. It was the presence of the relics of the royal saint that made Trondheim an archiepiscopal see and its high medieval cathedral an enormous building project.

When the new cathedral of Uppsala was projected in the second half of the thirteenth century, measures were taken to attract part of the stream of pilgrims who found their way to Trondheim; St Olaf even had his own portal in the new cathedral (Plate 48). Places along the road to Trondheim also benefited from their situation and flourished. One of the pilgrim routes passed through the province of Dalsland in western Sweden, today far from the main roads. Thanks to the pilgrims the people of this region could afford to build several churches of brick, at that time expensive enough to indicate wealth when used as the main building material. The church of Edsleskog was the biggest and most renowned of them all.

From southern Europe art objects and influences reached Scandinavia with returning pilgrims. Numerous crosses and caskets found their way to the north from Limoges, the centre of enamel production in the high Middle Ages, and many of them were probably brought home by people who had passed Limoges on their way back from Santiago de Compostela in Spain, one of the most famous European places of pilgrimage. Many Scandinavian churches owned such objects, even if only a limited number have survived to the present day. Holy images visited by pilgrims, for instance the miraculous Volto Santo crucifix in Lucca, inspired copying and a number of such copies are to be found in Scandinavia.

Ecclesiastical centres were of course important for art production. The archiepiscopal see of Lund in Skåne, in the first half of the twelfth century the metropolitan centre of the whole of Scandinavia, had an early and particularly far-reaching influence on Nordic ecclesiastical art and architecture; it can be traced as far away as Bergen in Norway. But Lund's importance is, naturally enough, most evident in Skåne and other parts of the medieval Danish kingdom where we find the greatest number of Romanesque stone buildings and paintings in Scandinavia, often of a very high artistic quality. With a few exceptions the heyday of medieval art occurred later in other Scandinavian regions.

It is interesting to observe how the artistic and architectural importance of different regions has shifted depending on factors such as those mentioned above. Parts of Scandinavia which have from this point of view been peripheral and less important in recent centuries, for instance districts in western and northern Sweden, seem – to judge from archaeological finds and remaining art objects – to have been far more prominent in the Middle Ages; owing to trade or other reasons they had at that time a relatively dense population or numerous visitors. Along the coasts of northern Sweden and Finland churches,

some of stone, were erected where rivers met the sea, and many a small place keeps art objects of surprisingly high quality in its parish church. One of the finest Romanesque virgins, for instance, comes from Skellefteå in Västerbotten (Plate 25), a province where a lucrative medieval trade in fish, hides, furs, and other articles was carried out. Favourable economic conditions led to similar effects in north Norwegian fishing districts such as Lofoten and Vesterålen.

What remains of medieval art and architecture may provide useful cultural information but is far from giving us a full picture of the medieval state of art; too much has been lost. This should be kept in mind when reading the following survey which, within the space allotted, must necessarily concentrate on some examples.

The Romanesque style dominates in Scandinavian art between c. 1100–50 and c. 1225–75, followed by the early and high Gothic, and finally from around 1375 by the late Gothic. The first signs of the Gothic style appear already in the late twelfth century, though it always takes some time before a new taste is commonly accepted; thus a style period can never be exactly delimited. In the first half of the twelfth century Viking Age stylistic features were still fairly common. In handicrafts they survived even longer, and it is sometimes difficult to date such objects by means of style. One example is a pew from Kungsåra church in Västmanland, Sweden, which was probably made in the early twelfth century but whose dragon ornamentation would allow a dating to the Viking Age (Plate 26). Such dating problems exist in all centuries of early art history where documents rarely exist to support theories, but the problem is more noticeable with regard to handicraft than other artistic activities. As late as the eighteenth century, for instance, Gothic features may be found in furniture decoration.

Romanesque architecture

A survey of Romanesque painting and architecture in Scandinavia should begin with the medieval Danish kingdom, though there are also many and interesting monuments from the Romanesque era in the two other Nordic kingdoms. However, within the limits of present-day Denmark alone, excluding the provinces which now belong to Sweden (Skåne, Blekinge, Halland), no less than about two thousand Romanesque stone churches were erected from the mid-twelfth to the mid-thirteenth centuries, of which more than 75 per cent are still standing, though sometimes more or less rebuilt. The round churches of Bornholm, whose possible non-sacral functions have been discussed, are particularly remarkable (Plate 27).

Among the most magnificent examples of Romanesque architecture are the present cathedrals of Lund, Ribe and Viborg. They all have a building history that goes back to the first half of the twelfth century. A comparison with the majestic cathedral projects of the Ottonian and Salian emperors might in these cases be justified. As regards Lund (Plate 28) it has been assumed that the builder of the apse, known as Donatus, was a Lombard by origin and that the cathedrals of Speyer and Mainz were in his mind when he built the apse in Lund. Another builder known by name, and probably a Lombard too, was Regnerus who cooperated with Donatus or took over from him; a considerable part of the sculptural ornamentation may be his work. All but the western part of the church was completed before the mid-twelfth century and the main altar was consecrated in 1145. The western part was probably completed by German builders, but their west front was pulled down and rebuilt in the nineteenth century when the church was subjected to a radical restoration.

It goes without saying that the see of Lund, established in 1060, would need a worthy cathedral when it became the archiepiscopal see of all Scandinavia in 1103–4. Considering the earlier connection with the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen it was also natural to bring in builders from the south and not from the west. The Danish king Erik Ejegod (d. 1103) had good contacts with Germany and its emperor, and had travelled through the country. We may assume that he had been inspired by the building projects he had seen there and that this had consequences when building work started in Lund.

In Norway wood was the dominant church-building material throughout the Middle Ages. Of the c. 1,200 medieval churches that were erected within the borders of present-day Norway only c. 270 were built in stone, and little more than half of these still stand today. The stone churches, much more expensive to build than the wooden ones, were concentrated in the areas with the densest population and the greatest economic resources: in other words, the richest agricultural districts, particularly in Østlandet and Trøndelag, towns and other central places along the coastal sailing route (Plate 29).

It appears that the earliest Norwegian stone churches were built in Trondheim in the latter part of the eleventh century, among them the first cathedral, King Olaf Kyrre's Christ Church. It was erected to house the relics of St Olaf and its foundations have been uncovered under the present cathedral. King Olaf also started to build a Christ Church as the first cathedral of Bergen, known almost exclusively from written sources. Both here and in Oslo and Stavanger, impressive Romanesque stone churches were erected

in the following century. One of them, the church of Gamle Aker in Oslo, still bears testimony to Norway's close contacts with England, while nothing remains above ground of the cathedral of St Hallvard with the grave of King Sigurd Crusader (d. 1130). Both of these Oslo churches were built in the Anglo-Norman manner with massive walls and pillars and a central tower. The Romanesque nave of the cathedral of Stavanger, too, reflects the close connections with England which were so important for medieval Norwegian architecture. However, in the case of St Mary's and other twelfth-century stone churches in Bergen it appears that some of the early inspiration, perhaps also some of the builders, came from Lund, to be superseded by English influences.

We have seen that the Christianisation of Finland from Sweden came late, in fact too late for stone churches to be built there in the Romanesque period. The oldest stone churches within the territory of the present Finnish state were erected on Åland, some of them as early as the thirteenth century, but church building in the archipelago in that century and the following stands out as different from both mainland Sweden and Finland (Plate 30).

In Sweden about 1,150 stone churches were built in the Middle Ages. Of the c. 270 stone churches found in the province of Västergötland, most, like those in Östergötland, were built in the Romanesque period. Remarkable examples can be found also on Öland and in the Kalmar region, some of them fortress-like (Plate 31). In the provinces north of Götaland the number of Romanesque stone churches is much smaller. This distribution of prestigious stone construction reflects both the economic and the political situation of that period. As Götaland's importance was later to diminish, the churches here often remain in their Romanesque form.

Among the more notable structures of the Romanesque period is Husaby church in Västergötland (Plate 32). The impressive west front is built of dressed stone while the walls of the church consist of ashlar. This type of masonry, well known in Denmark and also in Norway, came into use comparatively early in Västergötland where stone suitable for the purpose was easy to find. This was not the case in Svealand and the northern provinces where this way of building played a minor role. Here, whole or split boulders or rubble were the usual building material (Plate 56). Among the important Romanesque churches in central Sweden were the now-ruined churches of the old bishop's town of Sigtuna and the former cathedral of Uppsala, now Gamla (Old) Uppsala, where the central tower still reminds us of the Romanesque era.

In Iceland, too, church-building started soon after Christianisation. But most churches were of wood and very little is known about them, though

occasionally preserved fragments of their wooden structure tell us that they were stave churches. This is not surprising since with Christianity came church timber from Norway.

Altogether there must have been more than 1,000 wooden churches in Norway, including those that were replaced by medieval stone churches. Today only twenty-eight remain, among which the stave church of Urnes in Sogn in western Norway is one of the most renowned and perhaps the oldest. As it stands it may be dated to the mid-twelfth century but archaeological remains point to at least one previous church on the same site. Part of the carved decoration has Viking Age character and belonged to an earlier church on the site (Plate 20). Holes in the ground under the present church reveal that the earlier one belonged to the oldest type of stave churches with poles dug into the ground. This style of building meant that the structures were exposed to moisture and rotting from below and that they would hardly survive their first century. Without the more durable construction of later stave churches, erected on a frame of sills resting above the ground on a foundation of stones, it is unlikely that the present church of Urnes or any other medieval stave church would have survived.

One may ask why the Norwegians preferred to build in wood at a time when people in Sweden were building in stone. One reason may have been economic. The Church itself favoured stone-built houses of worship which in Norway mostly meant using ashlar or dressed stone, but this was an expensive building technique compared to building in wood which was abundant. One should perhaps also take into consideration the fact that the Norwegians were a seafaring people with an advanced knowledge of ship-building and that the construction of a stave church had much in common with the construction of a ship. Wood may then, for a number of reasons, have been the preferred building material for Norway's churches. By contrast, in Sweden, where most country churches were built in stone from the thirteenth century, there was a rich and abundant supply of suitable boulders which did not require transportation over long distances nor much cutting before use.

Wooden churches were also built in medieval Sweden and Finland – and in Finland this tradition of building in wood has continued unbroken to the present-day. In Sweden the churches of the missionary period were certainly built in wood but in most regions stone was preferred from the thirteenth century at the latest. Oddly enough, church-building in wood was revived in Sweden after the Reformation. Stave churches were also built there, one surviving example being that of the church of Hedared in Västergötland, built as late as the sixteenth century, but there are also fragments of stave churches

from the Romanesque era. The remains of one such church from Hemse on Gotland have been used in a reconstruction at the Museum of National Antiquities (Historiska museet) in Stockholm.

The architecture of the monastic orders was of great importance throughout the Middle Ages, particularly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Cistercians established themselves mainly in uninhabited regions rich in natural resources, bringing with them practical knowledge and skills in areas such as building techniques, agriculture, and mining. The order, sanctioned by the pope in 1119, soon reached Scandinavia, where bishops and even kings promoted new foundations. In 1143 the monastery of Alvastra in Östergötland was founded by King Sverker and Archbishop Eskil of Lund, the latter being a personal friend of the Cistercians' spiritual leader Bernard of Clairvaux. Nydala in Småland was founded in the same year and in 1144 the first Danish monastery of the order, Herrevad in Skåne, was founded by monks from Cîteaux. In Norway the earliest Cistercian convents were established from England: Lyse near Bergen from Fountains in Yorkshire (1146) and Hovedøya near Oslo from Kirkstead in Lincolnshire (1147). The promoter of the Cistercians in Lyse was Bishop Sigurd, who had visited Fountains.

The Benedictines had arrived in Scandinavia during the missionary period, coming in most cases from England and establishing their first Nordic convents in the days of Knut the Great, towards the end of the eleventh century. They expanded further in the first half of the following century but never gained the same importance as the Cistercians did later, probably because Scandinavia at that time was a rather undeveloped Christian region and remained so in the period when most of the Benedictine monasteries were founded. Some of the Benedictine churches are preserved in Denmark, for example those at Ringsted and Herlufsholm.

The founding and construction of a monastery was a lengthy process. The church of Alvastra, for instance, was not completed until the 1180s – the dawning Gothic style is visible in the pointed arches of its windows and arcades.

In the thirteenth century the hegemony passed to the mendicant orders who founded a considerable number of convents, mainly in towns but also in other places where people gathered from time to time. One fourteenth-century example of the latter is the Franciscan convent of Kökar on a small island on the sea route between Sweden and Finland and a centre for seasonal fishing.

The first establishment of the Bridgettine order, founded in 1370, was Vadstena in Sweden. From there several daughter convents were founded in

Scandinavia and northern Europe before the end of the Middle Ages. Vadstena became the most important Nordic religious establishment of the late Middle Ages.

Most buildings of the religious orders were ruined after the Reformation, but their churches were often re-used as parish churches and many of them still remain. The present cathedral of Bergen, for instance, was originally the church of the Franciscans.

Romanesque painting

Romanesque pictorial art and handicraft in Scandinavia is quite rich, even if it cannot compete with the magnificent treasures of some of the museums in central Europe. In some north European countries the Protestant Reformation dealt a formidable blow to pictorial art but not in Scandinavia, though measures seem to have been somewhat stricter in Denmark and Norway than in Sweden where the reformers regarded the pictures of the preceding Church with tolerance. The Swedish church ordinance of 1571 regarded pictures favourably, for pedagogic reasons.

Since the paintings from the Romanesque period are almost invariably to be found in churches, it is natural to turn first to Denmark where so many Romanesque churches still exist. Even though some of them have been rebuilt a considerable number of their paintings have survived, both figurative and ornamental (Plate 33). The other Scandinavian countries rarely have more than fragments or small parts of the original sequences. In Iceland no Romanesque wall paintings have survived and in Norway only a few. The stave churches did not invite painting of continuous, narrative picture series in the same way as stone churches. Only a few places, such as canopy ceilings, were suitable for this; the late Romanesque/early Gothic paintings of the Torpo canopy in Hallingdal, Østlandet, are examples of this (Plate 34).

Remaining fragments of Romanesque murals in Sweden show that in some cases the artistic quality was very high. This applies for instance to Kaga, Östergötland (c. 1200–25), the probable place of origin of the royal Sverkerian dynasty, and to the church of the Erikian dynasty in Eriksberg, Västergötland (c. 1170). Also, in the provinces bordering medieval Denmark, i.e. Småland, Öland and Gotland, the Romanesque style must have been well represented, though today only fragments remain. In the bishopric of Växjö in Småland the Classicistic periods of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant the demolition or rebuilding of the medieval churches to a much greater degree

than in most of the other bishoprics of Sweden. In central and northern Sweden there are very few examples of Romanesque murals; however, such paintings may have adorned the wooden churches that preceded the Gothic stone churches. The oldest paintings in Finland are found in Lemland church, Åland. They express both Romanesque and Gothic features and are dated to the last decades of the thirteenth century. Their theme is the legend of St Nicolaus who is frequently represented in the medieval Baltic region as a reflection of the importance of shipping and its dangers.

The finest Romanesque paintings in all Scandinavia are found in Vå church in Skåne (Plate 35). Recently redated to the first half of the twelfth century, they are of Italo-Byzantine character, a style that probably reached Denmark via Germany where it had been modified according to high Romanesque art. However, the oldest known church paintings from medieval Denmark are as early as the last quarter of the eleventh century. Altogether about sixty suites of paintings from the period 1080–1175 have been documented and an even larger number from the period 1175–1275.

In the Danish paintings, stylistic influences from various parts of Europe are visible. A French influence is noticeable particularly in Skåne and probably has to do with the close clerical contacts with Paris where most of the educated clergy of Lund had studied. The marked English influence in Jylland has no doubt to do with the trade relations with England. Part of the German influence on Danish art is certainly due to similar circumstances but here the close connections between Danish and German kings may also have been important.

The influence of geographical position and trade connections on art is also discernible in the early paintings of Gotland where, for instance, Byzantine paintings can still be seen in the churches of Gardå and Källunge, though reduced to fragments. Here the artists must have come to Gotland from the east. On the other hand, the paintings of Måsterby church seem to reflect west European influences, indicating that Gotland had other than eastern connections in this period. Öland was situated closer to the mainland and Denmark, and its cultural contacts were – to judge from the few remaining paintings – south-oriented.

It was long assumed that the Romanesque paintings of Scandinavia were painted *al secco* but this does not always seem to have been the case. Danish scholars have recently proved the occurrence of frescoes among the Romanesque paintings in Denmark, and the halos of the saints are sometimes made in relief by means of stucco technique. This may not apply to Denmark alone but remains to be investigated for the rest of Scandinavia.

In many of the European countries book illumination was an important art in the Middle Ages. At the courts of the princes and in the monasteries, luminous pictures in bright colours and gold were produced on parchment. These brilliant pictures were intended to enhance the impact of the text on the reader. In Scandinavia this art played a minor role, and was not undertaken until much later (see below). While countries like Italy, Germany, and England adopted Christianity early this happened a lot later in Scandinavia, and tradition seems here to have favoured ornamentation more than figural representation.

Romanesque sculpture

The building of cathedrals usually gave rise to centres of art which influenced the surrounding regions, as we have seen was the case with the cathedral of Lund. Though rebuilt, this cathedral still has original sculpture of high artistic quality, such as the richly adorned northern portal where the Lombardic influence is particularly visible. Many of the churches of present-day Denmark can also provide examples of high quality Romanesque sculpture. Among the best known is a relief from the southern transept portal of Ribe cathedral, showing the taking down of Christ from the cross; here the influence appears to be Westphalian.

In Sweden examples of Romanesque stone sculpture are mostly found in Götaland, especially in Västergötland, and on Gotland. Well known are the baptismal fonts of Gotland (Plate 36) which were made not only for the churches there but also for export to the mainland and to the regions south of the Baltic.

With the exception of a number of baptismal fonts and a few church portals, only fragments are left of Norwegian Romanesque stone sculpture. It was probably rare, wood being the preferred material, but among the more remarkable examples of stone sculpture is a head from Munkeliv monastery in Bergen, representing the founder, King Eystein (d. 1123).

Much of the Romanesque wooden sculpture, mainly crucifixes and madonna sculptures, has been lost, but the surviving material is nevertheless quite rich, especially in Sweden. Among the oldest madonnas is one from Mosjö in Närke, Sweden (Plate 37), which – to judge from certain stylistic features – appears to have been sculpted at a time when Christian and non-Christian ideals existed side by side, but as a whole it belongs to a west European stylistic context where its perhaps closest relative is a virgin from Urnes in Norway. Far removed from the almost frightening expression of these large-eyed madonnas is that of the gentle and youthful virgins from Viklau on

Gotland, Korpo in Finland, and Skellefteå in northern Sweden (Plate 25), which are related to French and Rhenish sculpture.

Impressive examples of large-size crucifixes from the end of the twelfth century are the ones in Tryde, Skåne (Plate 38), and Danderyd, Uppland. The crucifix from Horg in Norway with its preserved original colouring is also remarkable. Elsewhere, the colours of sculptures were modified to keep in step with changes of style. This meant that they were often repainted several times (in the eighteenth century if not before), or simply removed from the church altogether. This was the fate of many crucifixes from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which are sometimes recorded in documents as being 'horrible' or 'detestable', most likely because Christ's suffering was more realistically expressed than in the Romanesque crucifixes. The classical periods preferred the naked cross with only symbols of Christ's suffering.

Numerous sculptures representing saints, especially bishops, have also survived. The bishops are rarely easy to identify since they have lost most of their episcopal attributes. But studies of the frequency of various saints in Romanesque mural paintings allow us to assume that a good deal of these bishops may have represented St Nicolaus of Myra, the patron of trade and the protector of seafarers.

The Norwegian wood-carving tradition has left some of its most admirable examples in the portals of the Norwegian stave churches. The intricate coiling of the sculptured animals, intertwining with one another and with vegetative elements, forms the most elegant frame around the doorway. The design and execution of this ornamentation is evidence of a skill based on long tradition. In Sweden carved ornaments, such as those on the material from Hemse on Gotland, are evidence of an ornamental tradition of a similar kind.

Applied arts

By tradition the art of metal-forging was of great importance in Scandinavia. It was not accidental that even Nordic mythology had its Hefaiastos, the skilful smith Volund. Although the medieval application of this art does not equal the artistry of the Germanic Iron Age it is worthy of notice, at least in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Such art was often used for adorning altars, covering them with ornamented and sculptured sheets of gilt copper (Plate 39), or for cult objects of different kinds. The import of reliquaries, crucifixes and crosses from Limoges and other centres of enamel production started in the twelfth century and became even more important in the thirteenth century.

From German workshops there also arrived objects of cast metal such as baptismal fonts and monumental candleholders. Examples of altars of the kind mentioned above are most common in Denmark but can also be found in Sweden. Best known are the altars from Lisbjerg and Sahl in Denmark and Broddetorp in Sweden.

In this connection mention should also be made of the numerous wooden church doors and chests adorned with hammered iron ornaments and figure scenes which, silvered or gilded, contrasted effectively with colourful foundation layers of leather or woven fabric, applied to protect the wood.

Many of the metal objects were melted down and used for new purposes. This happened to the original shrine of St Erik of Sweden, which in 1573 was removed and used by King Johan III in a time of economic distress. Later, however, the king had a new and splendid shrine made for the saint. The costly shrine of St Olaf in Trondheim was taken away in the sixteenth century and brought to Denmark where it probably met with a fate similar to that of King Erik's shrine. Such re-use explains why it is not possible to assess the frequency of these objects, particularly not in a period as early as the Romanesque era. Among the still existing art objects in metal from this period are the beautiful brass vanes of the churches of Tingelstad in Norway and Söderala in Sweden.

A considerable number of smaller, imported objects in different metals have been preserved in graves and hiding places. Many have disappeared but we have seen that the churches nevertheless managed to keep a good deal of their treasures, sometimes even reliquaries, when such objects were taken by the Crown in connection with the Reformation and used for other purposes. In Sweden Gustaf I (1521–60) confiscated a large amount of church silver and also 'superfluous' church bells. In Norway and Denmark the confiscations in connection with the Reformation were even more extensive.

Textile production has a long history in Scandinavia, as indicated by pre-Christian finds such as those from Oseberg in Norway. The quality of these early textiles seems to have been high, but since little has been preserved it is difficult to generalise in this regard. The usual fate of textiles was a successive degrading of their use till they were finally worn out and thrown away. This is why our knowledge of them is almost always based on fragments that have only by chance been left and forgotten in church attics and other obscure places. Among the more well-known objects of the kind is a tapestry from Baldishol in Hedmark, Norway, the only Scandinavian tapestry to be woven in so-called gobelin technique. It appears to have represented the months of the year, of which only April with birds in budding trees and May with a knight on his frisky horse have been preserved (Plate 40).

Also well known are the Swedish tapestries from Överhogdal in Härjedalen and Skog in Hälsingland, both fashioned using the so-called soumak technique. The fragments from Överhogdal do not constitute a homogeneous piece of fabric. Most of them have been dated to the eleventh century but some of them are older, though the motifs are of the same kind. Many attempts have been made to interpret their pictures but none is really convincing. The Skog tapestry is younger than the one from Överhogdal and has been dated to the thirteenth century. Its motif is Christian and probably represents the combat between Christianity and non-Christian forces, but even here the interpretations differ.

Early and high Gothic architecture

The thirteenth century was a great period for art and architecture throughout Europe, and Scandinavia was no exception. New cathedrals were built at many bishops' sees, in most cases considerably larger than their predecessors. A good example is the cathedral of Linköping in Sweden which nearly doubled in size. In Trondheim and Uppsala impressive cathedral projects were being realised, and, as we have seen, the old archbishopric of Scandinavia at Lund already had its magnificent Romanesque cathedral.

At Uppsala a devastating fire in the first half of the thirteenth century seriously damaged the old Romanesque cathedral (the present church of Gamla Uppsala) and the young archbishopric of Uppsala, founded in 1164, needed a new and representative cathedral. The fire was clearly one reason for moving the archiepiscopal see; the fact that Aros, the place of the martyrdom of the twelfth-century King Erik, was situated close at hand was another. Erik's relics had been kept in the old, burnt cathedral and needed a new home after the fire, and what place could be more suitable than that of his martyrdom? A third and very important reason was that Aros was growing into a town and a strong economic setting was advantageous for the archiepiscopal see. Consequently, the new cathedral was built in Aros, which soon adopted the name of Uppsala.

From the beginning, the new cathedral was planned as a Gothic construction of the French type. But limestone was scarce in the region and was used only for portals, pillar bases, corbels, capitals, and other sculptural details; the rest was built in brick. That French builders were active at the first stage of construction is shown not only by the ground plan but also by documents. Some of the sculptures reveal a decidedly French touch. This is not surprising since it was in Paris that most of the higher clergy had studied and developed their ideas of structural and artistic form. During the second half of the fourteenth

century the building process slowed, and when, in the fifteenth century, the nave and the western part with the two towers were completed, a new era had begun and French influence had ceased. Before the cathedral was restored and made more 'French' in the late nineteenth century its towers were in complete harmony with the Gothic brick architecture typical of the Baltic region.

In Trondheim the building of a new cathedral had probably already started when the archiepiscopal see was founded in 1152–3. The plans were grand: the choir alone covered the whole length of Olaf Kyrre's Christ Church. The oldest part of the present cathedral is the transept, the building of which was started in the Romanesque style but completed around 1190 in transitional Gothic style, influenced from England where Archbishop Eystein (d. 1188) had been in exile 1180–3. There are features reminiscent of the cathedral in Lincoln that was destroyed in 1185. The cathedral builders in Trondheim continued to seek inspiration and possibly also workmen from England, but the cathedral also shows architectural features for which, as far as we know, there were no precedents in England at this time. This is the case with the so-called octagon – the eight-sided martyrdom of St Olaf at the eastern end of the cathedral – completed in the first part of the thirteenth century. The octagon over the central part of Ely cathedral was built more than a century later. For the placing of the martyrdom, the so-called corona in the cathedral at Canterbury may have been a source of inspiration. The corona became the martyrdom of Thomas Becket whose relics were brought there in 1220, but it must have been projected much earlier and had possibly been completed when work on the octagon started in Trondheim. In design, however, there are great differences between the two pieces of architecture.

The youngest parts of the medieval cathedral at Trondheim were the nave and the west façade, erected in the second half of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries. English influence is evident here too, not least in the screen-like west façade (Plate 41). The fires that struck the cathedral more than once through the centuries caused particular devastation to the nave and the west facade. However, both structures have been reconstructed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the Gothic sculptural works of the cathedral a French influence is visible.

A cathedral in Turku (Åbo) in Finland (Plate 42) is first mentioned in 1292. On the site of the present cathedral there was a wooden church with a stone sacristy. In the 1280s this small church was rebuilt and enlarged to be used as a cathedral after the episcopal see had been moved to Åbo from Koroinen (Koroois). This second construction was built of boulders. The next century

saw the addition of a big west tower and a pentagonal choir. The predominant building material now and in later building periods was brick. Further additions were made in the fifteenth century, among which were the present vaults and an octagonal All Saints' chapel in the east, used as the choir since the seventeenth century.

The impressive thirteenth-century brick cathedral of Roskilde in Denmark, resting place of many Danish sovereigns, is mainly a Gothic building, but in the eastern part late Romanesque features may be discerned. There are also additions from later periods. The cathedral was preceded by a wooden church, built in the eleventh century. But the most spectacular church in Denmark from the late Romanesque/early Gothic period is that of Kalundborg, built at the end of the twelfth century by Esbern Snare, brother of Bishop Absalon. Situated as it is on a hillock and visible from afar, this cruciform brick church with its square central tower and surrounding octagonal side-towers is believed to embody contemporary ideas of the 'heavenly Jerusalem' (Figure 7).

The period from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century was also a great time for the building of rural churches. It was then that the big Gothic stone churches were built in Gotland and the inhabitants of Åland started to build churches in stone. The particularly remarkable churches of Gotland bear testimony to an established building tradition and a well-trained body of stonemasons and other craftsmen whereas the churches of Åland were built of boulders or rubble.

All over Sweden most of the Romanesque parish churches were now enlarged or in some cases pulled down and replaced by new churches. In many cases the preceding church was of wood. In Norway, too, stone churches replaced some of the older stave churches and Romanesque stone churches were enlarged. As we have seen, Denmark followed a more continental tradition. Here the wooden churches were replaced with stone churches earlier than in the other Scandinavian countries.

The Gothic character of the rural churches is most commonly expressed in the height and the form of arches, vaults, windows, and door openings. Owing to the climate windows are only exceptionally found on the northern side. In the Romanesque country churches the chancel had been separated from the nave by a wall. Often the opening between the two rooms was small, sometimes less than a metre wide, and could in such cases be compared to a door. In the second half of the thirteenth and the first decades of the fourteenth centuries the openings between chancel and nave were widened or, more often, the old and sometimes very small choirs were rebuilt or pulled

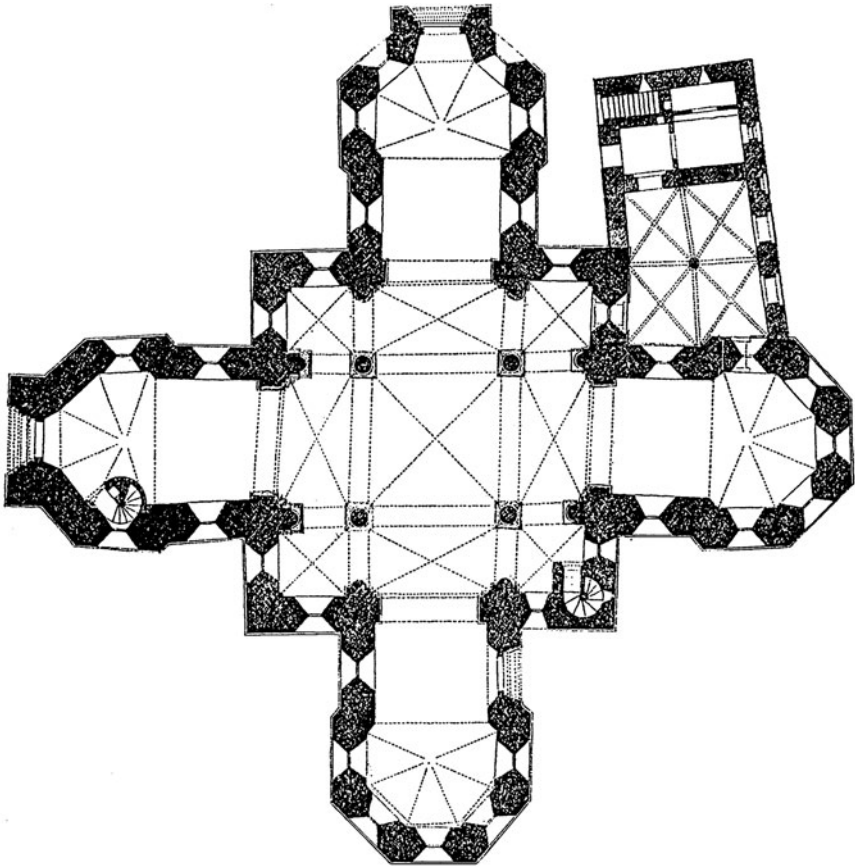


Figure 7 Kalundborg church, Denmark. With its cruciform plan and five towers it is one of the most original creations of the twelfth century. (After A. Tuulse, *Romansk kunst i Norden* (Stockholm, 1968).)

down. In the latter case the churches were transformed into one-celled barn churches without a separate chancel, hereafter the favoured church type. It has often been maintained that this change was influenced by the mendicant churches where preaching to the public played a central role and the nave was the most important part. But preaching did not have the same place in the ordinary country churches and a more plausible reason for the changes of their interior is the development of liturgy, particularly mass.

In the Romanesque period mass was mainly a concern of the priest who acted on behalf of the parishioners and did not necessarily have to be seen by them at the altar. In the second half of the thirteenth century the elevation of

the Host became an established part of the celebration of mass in Scandinavia, and the congregation was expected to kneel at the sight of it and adore it with lifted arms. Under these circumstances the lack of sufficient visual contact between chancel and nave became an inconvenience, which was certainly the reason for the changes described above.

Most secular medieval architecture has been lost and replaced by new buildings. However, good examples of both castles and more solid dwelling-houses, such as the above-mentioned stone houses of Gotland (Plate 24), are still standing. The simpler houses were built in less durable materials, mostly wood, and have rarely survived to present times. Among the more magnificent examples of medieval secular architecture are Håkon's Hall in the royal estate of Bergen and the palace of the Folkungs in Vadstena, both of them from the thirteenth century. The Folkung Palace was brought into use by the Bridgettine convent of nuns at the end of the fourteenth century. Håkon's Hall (Plate 43) takes its name from its first builder, King Håkon Håkonsson, and was completed before 1261 as the main building of the fortified palace complex which was erected to serve as the main centre of the consolidated Norwegian kingdom of the thirteenth century. In the nineteenth century the hall served as the storehouse of Bergenhus Castle and has been radically restored in recent times. Most of the stonework is, however, original.

The visual arts of the early and high Gothic era

Gothic visual arts in Scandinavia reflect the same pattern of influences that has been demonstrated in the Romanesque period. The connection with England generally continues in west Scandinavia while the arts of east Scandinavia show evidence of southern contacts. There are of course exceptions, and in the case of high Gothic art it is also sometimes difficult to trace influences since the style was rather international in character. A study of high Gothic visual art should first focus on Norway. Apart from a number of very fine sculptures it is the painted altar frontals of wood which deserve most attention. A remarkable number of these colourful adornments have survived to our times, possibly because they were more common here than elsewhere in the Middle Ages. They should be seen as integrated parts of the wooden interiors of stave churches where canopies of wood, painted in the same manner, often completed the altar equipment. In the neighbouring Scandinavian kingdoms where most churches were built in stone there are few examples of such altar frontals. Their pictorial compositions recall those of contemporary manuscript illuminations. Smaller scenes are frequently grouped around a central picture,

representing Christ, Mary or a saint (Plate 44). In the fourteenth century the Crucifixion tends to become the main representation, probably because the service increasingly focused on the Eucharist sacrifice.

Norwegian wooden sculpture from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries mostly displays English influences. Most of the surviving sculptures represent the Virgin or the crucified Christ; the national saint, Olaf, is also fairly common. Among the most beautiful sculptures is a crucifix of late thirteenth century type in Røldal church with its original colouring preserved. Among the madonna sculptures a magnificent virgin from Hove church gives an idea of the classic ideals of the thirteenth century (Plate 45). Her proportions are well balanced and the illusory thin fabric of her dress falls in soft folds betraying the form of her young body. The child on her knee, however, is depicted as a small-scale sovereign which would seem to indicate that the sculpture was made before the mid-thirteenth century when the representation of the Virgin and Child began to take on greater realism.

The greatest treasure among the high Gothic sculptures of Denmark is the big ivory crucifix of Herlufsholm church (Plate 46). As this was originally a Benedictine church the crucifix probably also once belonged to the brothers. The body of the Christ figure is of elephant ivory while the arms are made of walrus ivory. The workmanship of both parts is very similar, suggesting that the whole crucifix is in an original state; stylistically it belongs to the mid-thirteenth century. Its origin is disputed: the high artistic quality has caused many specialists to look to France while others have claimed that the use of walrus ivory points to Scandinavia.

Denmark, rich as it is in Romanesque paintings, also has many paintings from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, though most sequences are fragmentary. Among the earliest Gothic paintings are those in Karise church, Sjælland, dating from c. 1275. On the mullions of the east window the standing figures of Mary and St John are painted in mourning postures; they once surrounded the sculptured figure of Christ on the cross. Such medieval combinations of painted and sculpted figures occur occasionally.

The paintings of Skibby church, c. 1325, are among the better preserved high Gothic Danish paintings. Beside scenes from the birth and passion of Christ there are also moralities such as the picture of the three living and the three dead, the former embodied as three young princes with beautiful curly hair, gyrfalcons on their hands, and mounted on dapple-grey horses as in a fairy-tale (Plate 47). Their splendour illustrates the vanity of this world and is in glaring contrast to the three dead princes who lie powerless, eaten by worms, beside their fallen crowns. Such *memento-mori* motifs became common throughout

Europe from the fourteenth century and were painted in places in churches where they could be easily seen. They reflect the insecurity of times when death was never far away.

In Sweden and Finland there are also paintings from the high Gothic period but sculptures are more common. Most of the paintings from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are either fragmentary or they have been overpainted in the late Middle Ages or later. There are, however, a few well-preserved sequences to which we shall return later.

In the sculptural programme of Uppsala cathedral it is possible to trace the hands of French craftsmen. Particularly beautiful is the trumeau sculpture of the northern portal, representing St Olaf (Plate 48), a good example of classical French Gothic. However, most of the high Gothic sculptures in the cathedral were lost in the fires that have repeatedly devastated the cathedral, the last one in 1702. That the cathedral workshop influenced contemporary art production in the wider region is indicated by a number of wooden sculptures that may have been produced in the cathedral workshop or made by artists who had learned their trade there. In this connection mention should be made of a number of large figures of saints that have been found in some of the churches of the region and also of a virgin from Hedesunda church in Gästrikland.

It is not unusual for magnificent sculptures to have survived centuries of changing taste in churches situated in remote regions. An example of this is an expressive sculpture of Finland's national saint, Bishop Henrik, now the foremost treasure of Pyhtää (Pyttis) church in eastern Finland (Plate 49). It may be of Rhenish origin and has Romanesque features, which suggests that it should be dated to the first half of the thirteenth century. This would be too early perhaps for a picture of Henrik since his cult had hardly become established; Turku (Åbo) cathedral was not dedicated to him until 1296. The only symbol of identity is the figure under the bishop's feet, representing his murderer. As it is not made of the same block of wood as the bishop it is possible that this may be an adaptation of another bishop's sculpture, perhaps from the fifteenth century when the cult of St Henrik had become more established and his iconography more stable.

Just as remarkable as the sculpture in Pyhtää are two large figures of saints from Norra Ny church in Värmland, Sweden, one bishop and one apostle. These are also thirteenth-century sculptures but with a more decidedly Gothic character than the sculpture in Pyhtää, which lies between the two epochs. Both sculptures from Norra Ny are of amazingly high artistic quality, particularly considering that they come from a place which today is off the beaten track.

If we can assume that the sculptures from Pyhtää and Norra Ny belonged originally to these churches or their regions, they bear witness to a period when the provinces in question were flourishing. Norra Ny is situated on the river Klarälven, along which traders and pilgrims would have travelled when these sculptures were made, and Pyhtää is located where the Kymmene river meets the sea and the fishing was good in the Middle Ages. Such circumstances may explain the existence of such unexpected works of art in both churches.

Some of the most magnificent high Gothic wooden sculptures can be found on Gotland. Well known is the large-size crucifix of Öja on the southernmost part of the island, one of the many ring crosses characteristic of Gotland (Plate 50). Some of the Gotland sculptures were exported to other regions, for instance to Uppland, where a ring cross is found in Roslagsbro. And one of the most superb sculptures of the Swedish high Gothic period, the virgin of Överselö, Södermanland, is the work of a Gotland master. The works of the so-called Lieto (Lundo) master in Finland are also good examples of high Gothic sculpture (Plate 51). It is otherwise rather difficult to decide what was made locally and what was imported from abroad, particularly as medieval craftsmen were highly mobile and sometimes moved from country to country.

With regard to early and high Gothic painting in Sweden, the churches in Dädesjö, Småland, and Södra Råda, Värmland, deserve particular mention. In the Romanesque church of Dädesjö the whole interior, both the walls and the flat wooden ceiling, were covered with paintings by a certain Sighmunder in c. 1275. On the wooden ceiling the paintings are still in good condition (Plate 52), but they are badly damaged on the plastered walls. Master Sigmunder's paintings are of high artistic quality: each scene is enclosed by a round frame and these medallions are set in a network of large squares formed by rope-like ornaments. Stylised plant ornamentation fills the remaining spaces. The whole composition is reminiscent of ornamented metalwork. Both the name Sighmunder and his signature, written in runes, hint that the artist was of Scandinavian origin. His paintings represent the story of the birth of Christ with several legendary scenes and display both Romanesque and Gothic features.

The wooden church of Södra Råda in Värmland, Sweden, tragically burnt to the ground in 2001. Its magnificent choir paintings, effected by an unknown master in 1323, were of great artistic quality and considered to be stylistically influenced by contemporary French painting. This was based partly on the fact that one of the motifs, the Dormition of the Virgin, was rendered according to a refined pattern, never common in Sweden where the Virgin does not die in her bed but gracefully sinks down (Plate 53). In Södra Råda, however, she

was shown seated on a throne when death came to her. In the picture of her burial, angels cover her bier with noble delicacy while others swing censers, and Christ himself has come to bring her soul to Heaven.

Gotland became even more eminent as an art province in the early and high Gothic period than it was in the Romanesque era. Both a stylised type of plant ornamentation and an advanced style of figure painting are found and sometimes intermingle. In addition there are elements of architectural painting which sometimes serve to accentuate the construction of the building and sometimes imitate stone- or brickwork. The situation on the neighbouring island, Öland, is difficult to estimate, since much of the medieval architecture has been radically rebuilt or in some cases pulled down. Consequently, most of the pictorial art has disappeared, though some high Gothic crucifixes and virgins still give evidence of a high level of artistry. In Åland there are both sculptures and wall paintings from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, particularly in the churches of Sund, Lemland, and Jomala. The two first-mentioned churches display both Romanesque and Gothic features.

In the high Middle Ages some of the sculptures and altarpieces preserved in Scandinavia must have arrived from abroad by sea. This became even more common in the late Middle Ages, when art products were imported from countries south of the Baltic and from the Netherlands on a larger scale than ever before.

We have seen that very little medieval art has been preserved in Iceland but the remains give us an idea of what there once was. A painted altar frontal of Norwegian type has been found in the church of Möðruvellir, and some sculptures have survived together with some interesting late medieval textiles which look like copies of Romanesque ones. There are also examples of metalwork from Limoges. But the real treasure is a wooden door from Valthíofsstaður with two beautifully carved medallions (Plate 54). Among the treasures there are also some medieval manuscripts, one of which, *Islandsk tegnebók* (Plate 55), is of special interest to art historians. It is a sketch-book from the fifteenth century, probably once owned by a painter's workshop. It contains sketches of motifs from different periods thus revealing changes of style. Some of the illuminated manuscripts show a connection with manuscript painting in other countries. This is the case with *Skarðsbók* (University Library, København) from the second half of the fourteenth century where the illuminations are very skilfully effected.

Outside Iceland there is little evidence of local book-painting. Among the more important examples are a manuscript of the Norwegian Landlaw (Royal Library, København), dated to the first half of the fourteenth century, and a

copy of the Swedish Landlaw (Royal Library, Stockholm) from the first third of the fifteenth century.

Late medieval architecture

Building in brick had been introduced into Denmark as early as the eleventh century, and when the Gothic cathedral of Roskilde was erected, brick was already an established building material there. In Sweden, too, building in brick increased successively, though it never became as common as in Denmark.

Among the earliest brick churches of medieval Sweden is the Dominican church of St Mary in Sigtuna, Uppland, where the building works started in the first half of the thirteenth century. Very few medieval Swedish rural churches were entirely built of brick but many had beautifully ornamented brickwork gables and – even more important – vaults of brick. Until to the fifteenth century country churches generally had wooden ceilings, flat or barrel-vaulted, which easily caught fire when the church was struck by lightning. However, in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when brick-building had become more common, fireproof brick vaults became an economically viable alternative to wooden ceilings. Most rural churches in Sweden now got their first brick vaults, and many small rural churches as well as the more prestigious cathedrals and abbey churches were furnished with new towers, porches and chapels. Clearly, brick was a high status material but it also had practical advantages: it was fireproof, easier to work than stone, and an ideal material for portals and window frames where it was used even in churches built of boulders.

It was in the Danish kingdom, including the present south Swedish provinces, that brick became a common building material in the Middle Ages; here clay was abundant and the supply of stone sparse. In Norway brick was burnt from the mid-thirteenth century, particularly in the south-eastern part of the country where clay was available, but the material was only used for limited purposes by the Crown and the Church. It is consequently in Denmark that the most magnificent monuments in brickwork are found, for instance the church of St Mary in Helsingør where the strict vertical composition of the eastern façade has great aesthetic value. Its closest relatives are found in the countries south of the Baltic.

The towns along Öresund and those of the Baltic region had a lot more in common with each other in the Middle Ages than today, as we have already seen in their architecture. The Hanseatic trade promoted cultural connections, and towns such as Turku (Åbo), Stockholm, Visby, Tallinn (Reval), Riga, and Bergen were in close contact with towns along the southern Baltic coast such

as Lübeck, Wismar, Rostock, Stralsund, and Gdansk (Danzig). Among the burghers of Stockholm there were many Germans who formed their own guild, Saint Gertrude's, based in the present Old Town. They also had their own chapel in the church of St Nicolaus. In the 1580s the Germans of Stockholm began to build their own church, St Gertrude's, which still exists. Documents also give us many German names of craftsmen.

By the beginning of the fifteenth century the big building boom was starting to falter. The episcopal cities had their cathedrals, even if work was still going on in some places such as Uppsala, and in other places a chapel or a tower was added. Most parishes had built their churches in earlier periods and few new ones were built. The building activity, then, was mostly one of completion and addition. An exception is Finland where the building of stone churches started late and where a considerable number were built in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Plate 56).

The visual arts of the late Gothic period

In the visual arts, on the other hand, the fifteenth century and the rest of the period up to the Reformation was a rich one. A very great number of sculptures and altarpieces reached Scandinavia from the German regions south of the Baltic, particularly from Lübeck, and after 1500 from the Netherlands, particularly from Brussels and Antwerp. Of these imported art treasures Sweden and Finland today have the greatest number of preserved objects. We have seen that in Norway and Denmark the reformers of the sixteenth century were more opposed to pictures in churches than their Swedish colleagues and it is therefore difficult to form an idea of the situation of religious art before the Reformation. The case is even worse in Iceland where almost nothing remains.

In Sweden a considerable number of altarpieces and sculptures remained in the churches in the first centuries of Lutheranism; it was in the classicistic periods of the eighteenth and nineteenth century that the images of the Catholic era began to be viewed negatively, both sculptured and painted. It was particularly difficult for the champions of whitewash, filled with unhistorical ideas of the noble whiteness of classical antiquity, to accept the gaudy colours of medieval paintings and sculptures. In the seventeenth century, pictures were removed occasionally for reasons of decency or because they, as the clergy saw it, represented 'papistic superstition'. In Norway images were characterised as idols in the sixteenth century and their removal is in several cases documented. However, both in Denmark and Norway the picture of an

extremely strict Reformation has been modified by recent research and it is now believed that part of the imagery was removed in the centuries following the Reformation.

In Bohemia and Burgundy an aesthetic ideal developed in the last decades of the fourteenth century, commonly designated as 'the beautiful' or 'international style'. The soft and elegant folds of the clothing, the elongated, slender forms, and the s-curve were its foremost characteristics. In Scandinavia this style remained an ideal for some time after a more realistic style had appeared in other parts of Europe. The angular, broken folds of this new style could be admired already in the early part of the fifteenth century in the works of Jan van Eyck or Rogier van der Weyden but it did not appear in Scandinavia until the middle of the century.

A closer look at the late medieval pictorial arts of Scandinavia should start with Sweden, which has the greatest number of paintings and art objects. We have seen that the renowned Vadstena Abbey was built during this period. Magnificently endowed as it was, one would expect a corresponding wealth of art treasures. There were, and still are, many beautiful pieces of art in Vadstena (Plate 62), particularly the sculptures, but perhaps not to the degree one would expect. In the chapter hall of the nuns there is a good example of beautiful mural painting but the vault paintings of the church are of poor artistic quality and limited to plant motifs as ornamentation along the vault ribs. Whether there were also paintings on the walls of the church we do not know since the stucco has been removed. According to instructions given by St Birgitta herself, pictures other than those telling of the life and death of the Saviour should not be there to divert the attention of the congregation from the Holy Service.

The other Bridgettine abbeys in Scandinavia appear not to have had recourse to any extraordinary large number of art treasures either. Books may have been the real treasures of these convents, and the library of Vadstena is famous. The nuns were sometimes good copyists. There are also examples of their artistic endeavours in the books, often with a touching, naive charm and rather similar to the embroideries that the nuns executed for the needs of their institutions (Plate 57).

The Franciscans were known to favour pictorial art, as witnessed by the paintings in their churches, for instance in Stockholm and Arboga in Sweden and in Rauma (Raumo) in Finland. They also seem to have influenced the paintings in ordinary country churches, at least in the late Middle Ages, when they appear to have been very active. A picture programme which bears the stamp of Franciscan mentality is the one in Vendel church in Uppland, Sweden,

painted in 1451–2; it is typically didactic and also displays some more decidedly Franciscan features, among which are allusions to the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary (*Immaculata conceptio*), an idea dear to the Franciscans but at the time much contested, and also an exhortation to follow Christ (*Imitatio Christi*), demonstrated in a possibly unique crucifixion picture.

Of the Danish wall paintings from this period those of the Carmelite churches in Helsingør and Sæby from the first half of the sixteenth century should be mentioned. The Helsingør paintings consist of a plant motif as ornamentation with big Gothic flowers and sparse figures, very poetic in character. Those of Sæby are characterised by a drastic and humorous representation of the Last Judgement and by figures representing prominent brothers of the convent sharing the vaults with a number of well-known saints. The vigorous and realistic style of the paintings in Sæby may be seen as the counterpart of the soft and courtly features of the early fifteenth century (Plate 58).

It would certainly be difficult to find a quantity of late medieval wall paintings anywhere else in Europe to match the vast number of well-preserved Scandinavian paintings from the same period, mainly in Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Their artistic quality is often very high compared to the *al secco* paintings in other European countries. Mural painting south of the Alps and in Spain is based on other traditions and differs from that of Scandinavia in many respects. The same could be said of the paintings of eastern Europe where the Byzantine tradition predominates.

Many of the artists active in Scandinavia came from Germany. This was certainly the case with Johannes Rosenrod, who painted in Tensta church, Uppland, Sweden, in 1437. But there are also artists with Scandinavian names among those from the Middle Ages, particularly from the end of the period. Some of those known by name, for instance the painter Peter Henriksson in Finland, attained considerable skill (Plate 59). Among the domestic artists who, from a stylistic point of view, were not in the front rank but had great talent of expression was the Swedish wood-carver Haaken Gulleesson whose sculptures of Mary and other saints would surely have moved the heart of the medieval onlooker (Plate 60). Haaken was active in northern Sweden around 1500.

Many of the painted and sculpted altarpieces which reached Scandinavia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were admirable works of art. One such is the well-preserved Barbara altarpiece in the Helsinki National Museum, once belonging to Kalanti (Kaland, Nykyrko) church near Åbo, painted by the German Meister Franke of Hamburg in the early fifteenth century. The sculpted central part shows the dormition of the Virgin, her coronation in

Heaven, and four additional scenes from her legend. The paintings of the wings are devoted to the legend of St Barbara. Among the many late medieval Swedish altarpieces it is difficult to rank one as the foremost; there are too many exquisite examples. Very impressive, though not one of the largest, is the altarpiece of Vaksala church, made in Antwerp in the early sixteenth century. The artist shows considerable psychological perceptiveness in his representations of different personalities (Plate 61).

Of free sculpture from the late Middle Ages there is an almost countless number of objects preserved, some of very high artistic value. Who could not be touched by the mature and motherly sorrow of Mary in the Pietà of Pohja (Pojo) in Finland or impressed by the courage of the young St George of the Lübeck sculptor Bernt Notke's renowned group in the Stockholm Nicolai Church (Storkyrkan)? The Mary of Pohja is probably a west German work from the early fifteenth century; its psychological expression is remarkable and of a character that is rarely found in medieval art.

Notke's group of the victorious St George was commissioned by the Swedish governor Sten Sture the elder after his great victory over the Danes at Brunkeberg in 1471. According to the diary of the Stockholm Franciscans the sculpture was installed in the Nicolai church in 1489. In addition to the fight between George and the dragon the group also comprises the kneeling princess who, according to the legend, was saved from becoming dragon food by the courageous saint. One of the distinguishing traits of Notke's work is that he sometimes used additional materials in his sculptural compositions to enhance the realistic impression. Here the wings of the dragon consist of elk horns, a material well suited to give an illusion of outspread dragon wings. The donation of this sculpture was not only a pious gesture of the god-fearing Sten Sture but also a national political manifestation. In the picture of the victorious George, killing the dragon and saving the princess, Sten Sture saw himself as Sweden's saviour.

The multitude of sculptures imported to Scandinavia from Lübeck makes it easy to forget that a great number came also from other parts of the German-speaking region and from the Netherlands. This applies to the two magnificent fifteenth-century madonna sculptures from Vadstena and Gamla Uppsala, both Madonnas depicted standing. The Vadstena virgin (Plate 62) expresses a high degree of spirituality. The tender sadness of her face evokes the feelings of a mother conscious of her son's cruel destiny. She was probably sculpted in the southern Netherlands around the middle of the fifteenth century. The life-size virgin of Gamla Uppsala (Plate 63) is a Saxon work from around 1500. Despite its late dating it has very much of the expression of the standing virgins from

around 1400, particularly in the almost sensual way she exposes her naked baby.

Of the Danish altarpieces from the late Middle Ages it is necessary to mention at least two masterpieces: the Århus altar by Bernt Notke from 1479 and the so-called Bordesholm altar in the cathedral of Schleswig, made by Hans Brüggeman in 1521. Several works by the German sculptor Claus Berg are also preserved. He was active in Odense in Denmark where his expressive altarpiece in the Franciscan church (created between 1507 and 1522) bears testimony to an extremely dynamic artistic temperament.

Among the Norwegian sculpted altarpieces from the late Middle Ages that of Hjørundfjord church in western Norway should be mentioned. It has been ascribed to Claus Berg but is more likely to have been imported from Franken and has more in common with Tilman Riemenschneider's works than with those of Claus Berg. In its original state it was certainly a magnificent piece of art.

Even though there are some good Norwegian examples of late medieval art works, Norway cannot compete in this period with its neighbours. It is a matter of debate whether the import of art objects from Germany displaced domestic production and whether the economic decline of the late Middle Ages hindered large-scale artistic productions. In Denmark and Sweden–Finland there existed a wealthy nobility who provided churches and monasteries with magnificent donations. In Norway, however, the Norwegian nobility did not hold the same dominant position in society, the late medieval ecclesiastical institutions were generally struggling economically, and royalty was largely absent from the kingdom. A combination of any of these factors may have contributed to making late medieval art in Norway less lustrous than it once was.

Stone sculpture, which in the early and high Middle Ages had been an important part of Scandinavian art production, appears to have had less standing in the late Middle Ages even though there were some eminent achievements in this field. Adam van Dören's works, for instance in Linköping and Lund, are good examples. His style is vigorous and realistic, more expressive than aesthetically refined. It is typical of its time and expresses a new, non-aristocratic ideal, very different from that of earlier periods when the nobility set the tone as art patrons.

It has not been possible in this short survey to treat every kind of art or to give the same attention to all those treated. Funeral art is among the neglected fields, which does not mean that it is unimportant. It comprises many fine pieces of art, in stone as well as other materials such as metal. Not surprisingly, the most eminent monuments were commissioned by royalty, the

nobility and high prelates. A monument representative of the last-mentioned category can suitably mark the end of this survey: the exquisite cenotaph of the holy Bishop Henrik of Finland in Nousiainen (Nousis) church, a Flemish work from the first half of the fifteenth century. It was ordered by the art-loving Bishop Magnus Olai Tavast (1412–50), one of the saint's successors on the see of Turku (Åbo). According to an eighteenth-century source the monument was brought to Nousiainen in 1429. The main structure is of black stone, which has been covered with engraved brass plates. On the top surface there is an engraved full-length picture of the saint, framed by flamboyant Gothic architecture, and on the four sides of the cenotaph his legend is told from his arrival in Finland to the miraculous events that followed his martyrdom.

Music

INGRID DE GEER

Our knowledge of music in prehistoric Scandinavia is mainly based on finds of instruments. The most remarkable are no doubt the bronze lures of which about fifty specimens and fragments from the period c. 1200–500 BC have been discovered in Denmark as well as a few in southern Sweden, southern Norway, and northern Germany. The lures have normally been found in pairs. This cannot, however, be used as evidence of two-part music and the assumption that they were cultic instruments has been strengthened by depictions of lure players in Bronze Age rock carvings. The bronze lures seem to reflect influences from the south and from Celtic regions.

There are no finds comparable to the bronze lures in the Iron Age; the known musical artefacts from that period are mostly simple instruments such as rattles, bells and flutes, but also a few bridges for string instruments and a cowhorn with finger-holes from Sweden. The most spectacular find from this period is the pair of gold horns, probably wind instruments, that were found in south Jylland but later lost.

The archaeological material clearly reflects musical activity, particularly in southern Scandinavia where most finds have been made. But the instrumental and vocal sound milieus of the prehistoric North cannot be restored from extant instruments or fragments or from rock carvings. When foreign authors, mainly Latin but also Arabic, wrote about Germanic peoples in the first millennium AD they gave some superficial and mainly negative information about vocal music in particular. It is true that their impressions derived mainly from contacts with more southerly Germanic peoples but they may be representative of north Germanic population groups as well. This would seem to be confirmed by Adam of Bremen's mention, in the 1070s, of the manifold and 'shameful' (*inhonestae*) songs which accompanied the pagan sacrifices in Uppsala. Quite another picture of allegedly Scandinavian musical culture is presented in the epic Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* where singing and harp-playing is highly esteemed.

High medieval secular music

The evidence of song and music increases significantly in the high Middle Ages. Finds of instruments from this period have been made even in Finland and the islands of the Western Ocean. A more extensive iconographic material comprises depictions of Gunnar playing the harp or round lyre in the snake pit, sculptured in stone (mostly in Sweden) or carved in wood in three Norwegian stave churches. Mural paintings in churches, most of them in the territories of the medieval Danish kingdom, are an important, if not unambiguous, source of information about contemporary musical instruments.

In the old west Nordic literature, comprising Eddic and skaldic poems and Icelandic sagas, there are several references to music and musicians. This literature was recorded from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries and only the oldest poems can safely be taken as evidence of conditions in an earlier period. Nor can it be taken for granted that the musical information they give applies to the east Nordic region as well. With these reservations in mind the picture given by the medieval west Nordic literature of music as an important and respected cultural activity is quite convincing. Music is often described as possessing a supernatural power and plays a significant role in the Old Norse mythology. In the mid-twelfth century the skald Ragnvald Kali, earl of Orkney, mentions harp-playing and poetry among the skills he possesses; such proficiencies were presumably coveted in the courtly milieus of at least parts of Scandinavia at this time. Whether the skalds used music when presenting their poems is not known, but they were probably recited and some form of accompaniment by harp or lyre may have been used.

There is, however, one exception to the favourable mention of music and musicians in the literary sources, namely the high medieval 'players' (ON *leikarar*, Lat. *joculatores*), travelling foreign or native performers who played music, clowned and juggled. In Scandinavia as elsewhere in Europe they were loved by the public but were practically without legal rights. They contributed to the spread of musical instruments such as various types of fiddle, shawm and bagpipe.

Towards the end of the high Middle Ages it became increasingly common for musical players to be engaged by princes and magnates who, by procuring entertainment, demonstrated their status. In war, drums, trumpets and other wind instruments were used, and new possibilities were opened when towns started to employ their own musicians. In spite of this the social position of most musicians did not improve significantly. Scandinavian law-codes reflect the contemptuous attitude of the authorities and particularly the Church

towards musical players. Nevertheless, the courtly milieus and the general public continued to be fascinated by them. There is information that Scandinavian kings and princes surrounded themselves with musicians at festive occasions and when travelling abroad, and that foreign musicians performed in Scandinavia.

With the help of archaeological, iconographic and literary sources it is possible to form some impression of high medieval secular music in Scandinavia. The most important evidence, recorded music, is, however, almost completely lacking, which is not surprising in view of the fact that secular music was often improvised and rarely put into writing. One of the exceptions is a Danish melody fragment from about 1300 in the so-called *Codex runicus*. Under the melody is written: 'I dreamt a dream tonight of silk and costly cloth' (*Drömd e mik en dröm i nat um silki ok ärlik päl*).

Church music

When Scandinavia was officially Christianised from the late tenth century Gregorian chant was already well developed in the service of the Roman Catholic Church and there were conscious efforts to standardise the church song. In the early Christian period the musical aspect of the service was hardly advanced in Scandinavia but by the latter half of the twelfth century the situation had improved considerably. The three Nordic archiepiscopal sees had then been established, the number of religious orders and their institutions was increasing, and schools were in operation at the episcopal sees with church song as one of their central subjects. Already in the early twelfth century the first bishop of Hólar in Iceland, Jón Ögmundsson, had imported a French cleric to teach music. Such teaching must have improved with the establishment of more developed cathedral schools in Denmark and Norway from the second half of the twelfth century, somewhat later in Sweden and Finland. The sees of Lund, Trondheim and Åbo (Turku) appear to have been particularly important for the early development of church music in their respective regions.

In spite of the endeavours to standardise church music, regional variations continued to make themselves felt. In particular there was for a long time a difference between areas influenced on the one hand from France and England and on the other hand from Germany. Sweden, for example, was dominated by German influences in the east and by French influences in the rest of the country, and Norway and the Norse island communities of the Atlantic were for a long time affected by English church music. It should also be mentioned

that the Orthodox Church had some influence in eastern Finland/Karelia, but there are no musical remains left of this connection.

Scandinavian church music could also be creative. We have seen that all three kingdoms had their national royal saints by the end of the twelfth century, to whom were added local saints for Orkney (St Magnus), Iceland (St Thorlákr) and Finland (St Henrik). All these saints required their own liturgies of which some are still extant with notes. The liturgy from the canonisation of the Danish Knud Lavard in 1170 (Chapter 12(b)), for example, has been preserved in a copy from the end of the thirteenth century. The text of the liturgy of the Norwegian St Olaf is still known but it has only been possible to reconstruct part of the music. *Officium Sancti Thorlaci* in memory of Bishop Thorlákr of Skálholt (d. 1193) is the most valuable musical document from high medieval Iceland.

With few exceptions new Scandinavian liturgies and other creations in the field of church music made use of pre-existing European melodies. This is generally the case even with the sequence poetry which flourished late and intensely in Scandinavia; almost all sequences appear to consist of new texts to older melodies. Thus the first complete pieces of notated music from Denmark, three sequences in *Liber daticus Lundensis* (probably c. 1170), are known from the Continent. A number of other sequences are assumed to use older music but so far without strict documentation. This is the case with the gratulatory song that was written for the wedding of King Eirik Magnusson and the Scottish Princess Margaret in Bergen 1281. It survives in a manuscript which may have been written in the 1280s, perhaps in Orkney, and has ended up in Uppsala.

The same manuscript contains the so-called Magnus hymn which celebrates Orkney's 'national' saint, Earl Magnus (d. c. 1115). If anything, the music of the 'hymn', *Nobilis humilis*, is of *conductus* character (a freely composed setting of a single metrical Latin text). It is composed for two voices, mainly with parallel thirds, and belongs melodically and structurally to a north-west European area of influences. In the above-mentioned Knud Lavard liturgy there is a hymn, *Gaudet mater ecclesia*, with two melodies that can be executed in two voices as a canon. There is no other notated polyphonic music left from the Scandinavian high Middle Ages.

Late medieval music

The musical climate of west Scandinavia deteriorated in the late Middle Ages, due to the fact that Crown, Church and aristocracy in Norway suffered badly from the consequences of the loss of population. In addition, the unions with

Sweden and Denmark (see Chapters 23 and 24) meant that the monarchy moved away and the country lost its courtly milieu. Such milieu, which favoured the development of secular music in Denmark and Sweden, were also lacking in Iceland and Finland.

From Norway and the islands of the Western Ocean there is only sporadic information about late medieval secular music and musicians. In Finland such musicians are first mentioned in fifteenth-century sources but they probably performed earlier than that. Notated secular music is not known from these regions and is also sparse in the rest of Scandinavia. However, secular music and dance were an international phenomenon and music recorded in other European countries may give an impression of what was also heard in the North.

More is known about secular music in Denmark and Sweden. In Denmark town musicians began to organise their own guilds and there are references to instruments and individual musicians. From the mid-fifteenth century court accounts give sporadic information about native and foreign singers, trumpeters, and other musicians and their wages. The same is largely true for Sweden.

There is little doubt that secular music played a significant role in most Scandinavian regions throughout the Middle Ages. The lack of direct, notated evidence makes it impossible to grasp the distinctive northern features such music may have possessed but it seems probable that these features were mostly variations of a general European musical culture. Exchange of music, instruments and musicians between Scandinavia and foreign regions must have occurred from an early date. Church music would also have influenced secular music – and vice versa.

Scandinavian folk music is not directly known until the recording of a few melodies in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, and systematic collection did not start until the nineteenth century. The melodies of some popular ballads may be medieval in origin, going back perhaps as far as the thirteenth century in Denmark; they should probably be regarded as Nordic variations of contemporary European music. Four melodies that were recorded from an Icelandic singer and published by the French scholar de la Borde in 1780 were thought to be Viking Age Eddic and skaldic tunes, but this is hardly convincing. Some musical genres distinctive of Scandinavia in modern times may to some extent have their roots in the Middle Ages, such as the two-part, *organum*-like Icelandic song (with two melodic lines moving parallel at the same interval), lays and dance songs from Føroyar, Finnish Kalevala-songs, Karelian crying songs, Samic chant, and Norwegian and Swedish

musical calls to animals. But here, too, recording only started in the nineteenth century.

Scandinavian church music is better evidenced in the late Middle Ages than earlier. References to organs appear in the sources from the fourteenth century (in Denmark even as early as the thirteenth century), and there are remains of Swedish organs from about 1400. It should be noted that Scandinavia was now not only at the receiving end; in a few cases impulses went the other way, towards Europe. A clear example is the weekly ritual of the Bridgettine order, *Cantus sororum*, with new texts to largely older melodies. St Birgitta declared that polyphony was not to be tolerated in her order, which shows that it occurred in contemporary Scandinavia, although it can hardly have been as advanced as on the Continent.

From the mid-fifteenth century it appears that the production of liturgical books increased, mostly manuscripts but also printed editions from the end of the century. A comparatively large body of manuscripts and printed books has been preserved in Denmark and Sweden. From Norway there remains above all two magnificent works, *Missale Nidrosiense* and *Breviarium Nidrosiense*, both of them printed in 1519 and evidencing a fully developed liturgy.

A lot of medieval musical material was lost in the Reformation when manuscript liturgical books were partly cut up and used for book binding. It has, however, proved possible to save some of this material. From Denmark there are about 50,000 extant fragments, most of them very small, from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The situation in Norway is much the same whereas a comparable number of fragments in Sweden and Finland comprises many complete sheets or pages. The study of this material is a great and far from finished endeavour but much has already been achieved.

One good example is the reconstruction, on the basis of parchment pages, of the first printed Finnish missal, *Missale Aboense*, from the end of the fifteenth century. New material, giving fresh information, appears all the time. Not long ago a fragment of an Icelandic *Graduale Gufudalense* from c. 1450–70 was recovered, containing the complete notated music to a sequence in honour of St Magnus of Orkney. The music had formerly only been incompletely known, but it is now possible to show that it was older than the text. The writing of the medieval history of Scandinavian music is thus not finished. There is still much to discover, add and revise.

PART VI

*

LATE MEDIEVAL SOCIETY
(C. 1350–1520)

Population and settlement

JOUKO VAHTOLA

In the early and high Middle Ages there was a considerable expansion of population, settlement and production not only in Scandinavia but all over Europe. By the early decades of the fourteenth century it appears that this expansion had begun to slow down in western and northern Europe and that a decline even occurred in places. Clearing of the land had advanced into areas of poorer soil or less favourable climate, or had led to the establishment of farms that were too small to be viable. Population sizes may thus have been approaching the limits of subsistence. It should be noted, however, that this 'marginal land theory' and the assumption that a decline in population had, for example, already set in around 1320 in England have also been criticised as insufficiently evidenced.¹ Another factor was that serious epidemics were beginning to break out by that time. Moreover, the climate started to turn colder towards the end of the thirteenth century and the period from approximately 1330 to 1390 appears to have been a cold interval in Scandinavia.²

In 1931 the historian C. A. Christensen showed that land prices in Sjælland dropped dramatically from about 1330, reflecting a corresponding fall in land rents. From this it has generally been assumed that an agrarian crisis was in evidence in Denmark by the first half of the fourteenth century, with deserted farms being referred to around 1315 and abandoned churches in the diocese of Ribe by the beginning of the fourteenth century.³ More recently, however,

1 N. Hybel, 'Marginaljordstesens storhed og fald', in C. Bjørn et al. (eds.), *Marginaljorder i fortid, nutid og fremtid* (Odense, 1992), pp. 69–83; N. Hybel, 'Teorier om de vesteuropæiske godssystemers afvikling i senmiddelalderen', in P. Ingesman og J. V. Jensen (eds.), *Danmark i Senmiddelalderen* (Århus, 1994), pp. 47–68.

2 K. R. Briffa et al., 'A 1,400-year tree-ring record of summer temperatures in Fennoscandia', *Nature*, 346 (1990), pp. 437–9.

3 C. A. Christensen, 'Nedgangen i landgilden i det 14. aarhundrede', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 10:1 (København, 1931), pp. 446–65; C. A. Christensen 'Ændringerne i landsbyens økonomiske og sociale struktur i det 14. og 15. århundrede', *ibid.*, 12:4, pp. 343–4; E. Porsmose, 'Middelalder, o. 1000–1539', in C. Bjørn (ed.), *Det danske landbrugs historie*, 1 (København, 1991), pp. 321, 329; E. Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser i middelalderen* (København, 1968), p. 142;

it has been argued that the latter signs of crisis have not been sufficiently documented. The fall in land prices is clear enough but may also have been caused by the extraordinarily warlike situation of the 1330s and 1340s.⁴ At any rate, the fundamental cause of the desertion of farms and even whole villages which occurred in fourteenth-century Denmark was depopulation caused by the Black Death, culminating in 1350, and later plague epidemics.

In Norway there are a few indications of economic difficulties and settlement stagnation in the decades preceding 1350 but these are difficult to interpret. Some farms were deserted and in some cases there was also a decline in land rents, but no real crisis can be said to have manifested itself until the mid-fourteenth century.⁵ There then followed an extremely sharp drop in land prices and a little later also in land rents and payments of tithe to the Church.

No appreciable signs of stagnation can be said to have emerged in Sweden before the mid-fourteenth century, although the amalgamation of parishes in northern Småland at that time may be a symptom of either population decline or impoverishment. There is also mention of serious epidemics in 1314–15,⁶ but intensive pioneer settlement continued in most areas until the mid-fourteenth century.

The high medieval settlement expansion in Finland and in northern Sweden and Norway continued into the late Middle Ages. The economy of these vast regions was based on a variety of forms of livelihood, chiefly hunting, fishing, animal husbandry and agriculture, and there was no threat of overpopulation due to insufficient resources at any time during the Middle Ages.

S. Gissel, 'Rents and other economic indicators', in S. Gissel et al. (eds.), *Desertion and Land Colonization in the Nordic Countries c. 1300–1600* (Stockholm, 1981), pp. 142–4, 162–3; K. Hørby, *Velstands krise og tusind baghold 1250–1400* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, 5, København, 1989), pp. 199–204; S. Gissel (ed.), *Falsterundersøgelsen*, 1 (Odense, 1989), pp. 357, 369, 371; E. Ulsig, 'Den senmiddelalderlige agrarkrise', *Historie, Jyske Samlinger*, 15 (1983–5), p. 221.

4 E. Ulsig, 'Pest og befolkningsnedgang i Danmark i det 14. århundrede', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 91 (København, 1990), pp. 23–4; E. Ulsig, 'Højmiddelalderens danske godssystem set i europæisk sammenhæng', *Bol og By*, 1996:2, p. 2.

5 J. Sandnes, *Ødetid og gjenreisning: Trøndsk busetningshistorie ca. 1200–1660* (Oslo, 1971), pp. 209–13; J. Sandnes and H. Salvesen, *Ødegårdstid i Norge: Det nordiske ødegårdsprosjekts norske undersøkelser* (Oslo, 1978), pp. 155–6; K. Helle, 'Down to 1536', in R. Danielsen et al., *Norway: A History from the Vikings to Our Own Time* (Oslo, 1995), pp. 40–1, 92–3.

6 L.-O. Larsson, *Det medeltida Värend* (Lund, 1964), p. 178; K. Bååth, *Öde sedan stora döden var . . . , Bebyggelse och befolkning i Norra Vedbo under senmedeltid och 1500-tal* (Lund, 1983), pp. 107–9; E. Jutikkala, 'Ilmaston muutokset ja historia', in P. Karonen (ed.), *Pane leipään puolet petäjäistä: Nälkä – ja pulavuodet Suomen historiassa* (Jyväskylä, 1994), p. 18.

Diversification also meant that the economy was not so sensitive to climatic fluctuations.

Population trends c. 1350–1520

Medieval demographic conditions are characterised by high birth rates and particularly high death rates. Mean life expectancy was low even under normal conditions, with estimates of not more than 15–18 years on average at the age of twenty and 18–23 years at birth. The proportion aged over sixty was probably very small. Mortality was particularly high among infants and children so that as many as half of the children died before their seventh year. But the high death rate stimulated an even higher birth rate, and when circumstances were favourable – i.e. in the absence of famine or disease – the population grew. Hard work and frequent pregnancies may explain why fertile women's life expectancy appears to have been somewhat lower than that of men of the same age (cf. Chapter 9).

The balance between birth rate and mortality was a sensitive one, easily upset by epidemics which increased mortality many times over and led to a decline in the size of the communities, sometimes even to their collapse. Child mortality was high even under normal conditions while epidemics were fatal for the working-age population in particular. As households predominantly consisted of nuclear families made up of an estimated average of 4.5 members (six at the most), even minor demographic accidents led to difficulties, at worst the abandonment of farms. It should also be remembered that the abolition of slavery weakened the population base of the peasant households. Farms supporting large families or joint families (grandparents, brothers, children with their families), as may have been the case in areas of Finland and possibly also Sweden, could withstand population losses better and avoid desertion.

The Black Death, which ravaged Europe in 1347–52, was the first and most devastating of a series of plague epidemics which broke out from time to time until the early eighteenth century. Plague was imported into Europe, from Africa (e.g. the Justinian plague of 541) or from Asia, as in 1347, and when it reached Scandinavia it was brought by sea, mostly from England, but sometimes from the Hanseatic towns, travelling along the coasts of the Baltic and the North Sea. Plague is caused by a microbe, *Yersinia pestis*, which is endemic in rodents in certain areas and normally affects humans via fleas living as parasites, usually on black rats. Plague is generally of the bubonic type, which, without modern medical treatment with sulphur or antibiotic drugs,

will kill half or more of those infected; in the Middle Ages perhaps as many as 80–90 per cent. The rarer pneumonic plague is even deadlier and at that time probably killed nearly everyone infected.⁷

From the arrival of the Black Death in Italy from the east in October 1347 until the weakening of the virulence of the first wave and its end in 1352, the only European areas to escape it were Bohemia, part of Poland and Russia, Finland, northern Sweden, Iceland and Greenland. Lack of evidence makes it difficult to trace the arrival and spread of the great plague in Scandinavia. Its progress is best known in Norway, but still only very roughly.

Research into the Black Death has on the whole been broader in scope and more intensive in Norway than in most other parts of Europe on account of the recorded dramatic effects that the great pestilence and later plague epidemics had there. There is definite information in contemporary Icelandic annals that the disease was transmitted to Bergen by a ship which arrived from England in the late summer of 1349; from there it is said to have spread rapidly all over the country. But according to recent investigations by O. J. Benedictow it may have broken out first in the Oslo region in the south-east, having presumably arrived from England in either the autumn of 1348 or the spring of 1349. It then spread inland and raged in eastern Norway in the summer and autumn of 1349. Along the coast it spread from the Oslo area as far west as Stavanger.⁸ This is, however, a view that has met with opposition.⁹

Other outbreaks of plague are known to have occurred in Norway in 1359–60 (the 'Child Death'), 1370–1, 1379 and 1391–2 but in the following century only in 1452, 1459 and 1500. The real number of outbreaks must, however, have been higher, with perhaps at least ten or so outbreaks up to 1521 and another ten between that time and 1654.¹⁰ As a result, mortality rates remained high and new population growth after the great loss in the second half of the fourteenth century slowed down.

The medieval population in Scandinavia can best be calculated on the basis of the numbers of farms and holdings and the estimated average numbers of people living on them. This is easier to calculate for Norway, with its settlement pattern of separate farms, than for Denmark, Sweden, and Finland where

7 For a detailed historical treatment of the epidemiology of plague, see O. J. Benedictow, *Plague in the Late Medieval Nordic Countries: Epidemiological Studies* (2nd edn, Oslo, 1992).

8 O. J. Benedictow, 'The great pestilence in Norway: An epidemiological study', *Collegium Medievale*, 3 (1990/1), pp. 31–2, 35–43.

9 H. Bjørkvik, *Folketap og sammenbrudd 1350–1520*, in K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norgeshistorie*, 4 (Oslo, 1996), pp. 16–19.

10 L. Walløe, 'Pest og folketall 1350–1750', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 61 (Oslo, 1982), pp. 1–45.

villages and hamlets predominated. But even so, the number of holdings into which named farms were subdivided in Norway and the average population per holding are to some extent uncertain; the numbers of inhabitants before and after the late medieval losses can thus only be estimated very approximately, and results tend to differ. It has been argued above (Chapter 9) that the central estimate, within margins of uncertainty of ± 15 per cent, should be about 345,000 persons for the whole medieval mainland kingdom of Norway (including the provinces of Bohuslän, Jämtland and Härjedalen, later lost to Sweden) when the population reached its highest figure in the first half of the fourteenth century, before the Black Death. This is considerably less than the otherwise common central estimate of about 400,000 persons within the borders of present-day Norway alone, corresponding to c. 425,000 in the whole mainland kingdom,¹¹ and would seem to indicate unusually strong growth in the Early Modern period.

On the basis of tax registers from around 1520 it has been calculated that more than half of the maximum number of high medieval named farms within the present-day borders of Norway were deserted and that nearly two-thirds of the corresponding number of holdings remained unoccupied at that time (see below). The loss of population, which was the obvious cause of the contraction of agrarian settlement, is thought to have been of about the same proportions; the latest estimates lie around 60–65 per cent. Not until the second half of the fifteenth century can one detect the first tentative signs of new growth in agricultural settlement. And not until well into the sixteenth century are there clear signs of growth in settlement and population across the country as a whole. It is commonly assumed that the pre-plague size of population was first restored around the mid-sixteenth century.¹²

The population fall in late medieval Norway was in other words both catastrophic and lasting. The demographic crisis can best be compared to what happened in England where the population may have declined from some 4.5 million to 2–2.5 million in the late Middle Ages,¹³ i.e. almost as drastically as in Norway.

Little can be said with confidence about the size of the Danish population in the Middle Ages, but within the borders of present-day Denmark, with the exclusion of Nordslesvig, it is thought to have reached a medieval maximum

¹¹ Sandnes and Salvesen, *Ødegårdstid*, p. 61; Helle, 'Down to 1536', pp. 24, 28; Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, p. 35.

¹² Sandnes and Salvesen, *Ødegårdstid*, pp. 93–106; O. J. Benedictow, *The Medieval Demographic system of the Nordic countries* (2nd edn, Oslo, 1996); Helle, 'Down to 1536', pp. 90–1; Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, p. 35.

¹³ J. Hatcher, *Plague, Population and the English Economy 1348–1530* (London, 1977), pp. 68–9.

of 600,000–700,000 persons around 1300, at which time the whole medieval kingdom of Denmark had perhaps a little over one million inhabitants. The number of medieval farms within the medieval Danish borders has been estimated at around 165, 000. Following the period of decline the population began to expand again at the beginning of the sixteenth century, reaching approximately 600,000 within the present Danish borders, excluding Nordslesvig, in the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁴

The plague year *par excellence* in Denmark was 1350 when the Black Death ravaged the country with devastating consequences throughout the summer and autumn. Its chronology appears to have been the same as in Germany. There is no information on population losses but they may well have been of about the same magnitude as in northern Germany where the population is thought to have declined by a half. Other outbreaks of plague followed in 1360, 1368–9, 1379, 1412–13, 1460, c. 1465 and c. 1483 (and perhaps other years as well). A concrete reflection of the loss of population is the fact that by 1600 a total of 143 medieval churches had been abandoned, 85 per cent of them in Jylland where one-third of the churches in some districts went out of use.¹⁵

The oldest source of information regarding the Black Death in Sweden is a decree by King Magnus Eriksson, most likely issued in September or October 1349, in which he warns his subjects of the danger threatening the country:

For the sins of man, God is punishing the world with a great scourge and sudden death, so that most of the people living in lands to the west of our country have perished. And it is now passing across Norway and Halland and heading towards us, so that everyone is restless about it.

The king had summoned his counsellors to Lödöse on the Norwegian border to discuss means of alleviating the judgement of God. His subjects were instructed to intensify their worship and their demonstration of belief in His glory.¹⁶

There are several documents from the 1350s and the later decades of the fourteenth century mentioning the great pestilence and the existence of

14 A. E. Christensen, 'Danmarks befolkning og bebyggelse i middelalderen', in A. Schück (ed.), *Nordisk kultur*, 2 (Oslo, 1938), p. 46; Benedictow, *Plague*, pp. 110–11; E. Ulsig, 'Plague in the Late Medieval Nordic countries', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 73 (Oslo 1994), p. 100.

15 Ulsig, 'Pest og befolkningsnedgang', pp. 32–42; Christensen, 'Danmarks befolkning', pp. 16–17, 37–41; Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 327–8; Walløe, 'Pest og folketall', pp. 22–23.

16 *Diplomatarium Suecanum*, 6, no. 4515; L.-O. Larsson, *Småländsk medeltid* (Stockholm, 1986), pp. 171–2.

deserted farms in southern and central Sweden, including Hälsingland to the north.¹⁷ In addition, folk-tales from various parts of the country contain extensive information on the plague and the horrors caused by it.¹⁸ Such tales abound in Norway too.¹⁹ They bear witness to the profound impression made by the great pestilence on the collective memory of the populations but should be treated with scepticism as evidence of the devastations of the Black Death.

The great plague probably reached Sweden at the end of 1349, although its main effect here, as in Denmark, was felt in 1350. There are indications that it was most severe in Småland, Götaland, Uppland and possibly Värmland. The population losses must have been great but like the Danish losses they cannot be evaluated to the same degree as in Norway. There were further epidemics in Sweden in 1359 (when the victims included King Erik Magnusson and Queen Beatrix), 1412–13 (claiming the life of Queen Margrethe), 1420–2, 1439, 1450, 1455, 1465, 1484, 1495 and possibly other years. A total of 400 persons in the town of Vadstena alone died of plague in 1413. The outbreak of 1420–2 was also severe, and the desertion of a large number of farms was the cause for much concern.²⁰

In Sweden as in Norway and Denmark the great pestilence was followed by frequent outbreaks of plague and other epidemics which together with several wars may have caused a further decrease in population; at any rate they restricted new growth. According to Swedish research the desertion of farms caused by depopulation was not nearly so severe and extensive as in Norway, and Danish research points in the same direction (see below). However, this does not necessarily mean that the losses of population caused by plague were less severe in Denmark and the affected Swedish regions than they were in Norway; such a difference would indeed be difficult to explain.

Rather it seems that the sharp reduction in the number of farms in Norway is a more direct reflection of the extent of the population decline than the recorded desertion of settlements in the neighbouring countries. Because of the above-mentioned Norwegian settlement of separate farms and holdings,

17 *Diplomatarium Suecanum*, 6, no. 4925; L.-A. Norborg, 'Pest, Sverige', *KLMN*, 13 (1981), cols. 247–8; Bååth, *Öde sedan*, p. 130; S. Brink, 'Den senmedeltida agrarkrisen i Hälsingland', *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift*, 20 (1990), p. 42.

18 E. Österberg, *Kolonisation och kriser: Bebyggelse, skattetryck, odling och agrarstruktur i Västra Värmland ca 1300–1600* (Varberg, 1977), pp. 70–5, 123; Larsson, *Småländsk medeltid*, pp. 176–8.

19 Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, pp. 14–15.

20 A. Lindborg (ed.), 'Diarium Vazstenense': *Vadstena klostets minnesbok* (Stockholm, 1918), pp. 1, 81, 103, 106, 134, 161, 214, 233, 253; Larsson, *Småländsk medeltid*, p. 180; N. Ahnlund, 'I den stora folkminskningens spår', *Vintergatan*, 1933, p. 54.

many of them quite small, the abandonment caused by depopulation was more extensive and conspicuous than in the Danish and Swedish regions, dominated as they were by villages, hamlets and otherwise close groups of generally larger farms. This was a settlement structure that made it easier to repopulate deserted farms, and since many villages and hamlets continued to exist the loss of population may have been obscured in surviving sources. In addition, a greater number of landless or near-landless labourers were probably to be found in the central agricultural districts of Denmark and Sweden than in Norway. They could disappear without leaving a trace on the actual agricultural settlement pattern. To the extent that they survived the demographic crisis and settled on available land they would also limit the number of abandoned farms.²¹ Differences such as these do not allow demographic conclusions to be drawn so directly from the recorded settlement contraction in Denmark and Sweden as in Norway.

The number of farms in medieval Sweden, excluding Finland, has been estimated at about 75,000 before the late medieval decline of population, and the number of inhabitants may have amounted to some 500,000–650,000. New population growth and settlement expansion seem to have started in the last decades of the fifteenth century and continued vigorously throughout the next century so that by 1570 a population level of about 600,000 had been reached.²² In northern Sweden the population presumably continued to grow throughout the late Middle Ages, mainly as the result of colonisation.

There is no evidence that the Black Death ever reached Finland and there is only limited information available on later outbreaks of plague in 1495, 1504, 1505, 1508–11, 1517 and 1530. The Black Death is known to have ravaged Russia in 1349–54 and numerous new outbreaks of plague occurred there throughout the fifteenth century. There is, however, nothing to suggest any late medieval population decline or economic crisis in Finland. On the contrary, developments such as the spread of settlement into new areas, founding of new parishes and chapels, economic expansion, and the extensive construction of new churches in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries suggest that population growth continued. A remark made in a tax complaint in 1545 – ‘we’d grown too many to live in one house’ – is an indication of the pronounced increase in population which was the catalyst for the northward and eastward

²¹ Helle, ‘Down to 1536’, p. 92.

²² L.-O. Larsson and E. Österberg, ‘Vasatiden och stormaktstiden’, in G. Behre et al., *Sveriges historia 1521–1809* (Stockholm, 1985), pp. 7–8; L. Magnusson, *Sveriges ekonomiska historia* (Falun, 1996), pp. 45–6.

colonisation undertaken by the people of Savo at the end of the Middle Ages.²³

The growth of population and settlement in medieval Finland continued into the early Modern Period and culminated in the 1560s, by which time the land had a total of 34,000 farms and a population of around 250,000–300,000, suggesting a threefold increase since the beginning of the fourteenth century. In the 1570s great difficulties set in (wars, forced conscription into the army, diseases and years of famine), marking the beginning of a period of 150 years during which the population increased very slowly, to less than 350,000 by 1722.²⁴

Iceland escaped the Great Plague of 1349–50, as did Greenland, because the havoc it caused in Norway brought to a halt all shipping to Iceland. It has been estimated that there were 5,000–6,000 peasant holdings in Iceland in the thirteenth century and 32,500–39,000 inhabitants at that time, assuming an average of 6.5 persons living on each farm (cf. Chapter 9).

The Icelandic population may have increased in the second half of the fourteenth century but the country suffered two severe outbreaks of plague in 1402–4 and 1494–5, both of them causing serious population losses. The plague of 1402–4 may have killed one-third or even two-thirds of the inhabitants but it has been estimated that the population had recovered from this disaster by the middle of the century. The losses in 1494–5 may have been smaller and farms were not abandoned on such an extensive or permanent scale as in Norway.²⁵

The data currently available suggest that there were more than 500 sites of Norse settlement in Greenland in the Middle Ages, most of which were farms (altogether some 300). The total population can be estimated at some 2,000–3,000 persons.²⁶ In the late Middle Ages the entire Norse population

23 E. Orrman, 'Huomioita myöhäiskeskiajan ja 1500-luvun asutustaantumista Pohjois- ja Koillis-Euroopassa', *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja*, 85 (1987), p. 24; M. Kallioinen, 'Pestepidemierna och bosättningsexpansionen i det medeltida Finland', *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 83 (1998), pp. 432–52; M. Hiekkänen, *The Stone Churches of the Medieval Diocese of Åbo* (Vammala, 1994), pp. 217–56; A.-P. Palola, 'Yleiskatsaus Suomen keskiaikaisten seurakuntien perustamisajankohdista', *Faravid*, 18–19 (1996), pp. 76–104; A. M. Soininen, *Pohjois-Savon asuttaminen* (Helsinki, 1981), pp. 243–9.

24 K. Pitkänen, 'Suomen väestön historialliset kehityslinjat', in K. Pitkänen (ed.), *Suomen väestö* (Hämeenlinna, 1994), pp. 34–9.

25 Benedictow, *Plague*, p. 112; M. Stefánsson, *Iceland*, in P. Pulsiani (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1993), p. 312.

26 C. L. Vebæk, 'Kolonisation af Grønland', *KLNM*, 8 (1963), col. 654; J. Berglund, 'The decline of the Norse settlements in Greenland', *Arctic Anthropology*, 23 (1986), pp. 113, 129–34.

disappeared and the settlements were left uninhabited. There is no evidence that epidemics of plague or any other disease caused the desertion, though it cannot be excluded; Greenland was only four days' sail away from Iceland. It is, however, more likely that the settlements were abandoned for other reasons, which will be discussed below.

It can be concluded that the population of Scandinavia declined at least as radically in the late Middle Ages as that of the rest of Europe, mainly on account of outbreaks of plague. Evidence for the occurrence of the Black Death and later waves of plague has been found mainly in the western and southern parts of Scandinavia, i.e. in the same areas where a decline in settlement and indications of economic crises have been demonstrated. It appears that the Black Death either did not spread to the northern and eastern parts of Scandinavia, or was limited in its effects there. An explanation for this should probably be sought in the short sailing season, the sparse population, the small number of towns, and the long distances between settlements.

Norway: dramatic settlement contraction

As late as the 1930s European historians generally tended to label the late Middle Ages as a period of expansion in settlement and economy. Since then intensive investigations have led to the conclusion that this was, on the contrary, a period of crisis, particularly with regard to agrarian development. A considerable amount of new data on desertion and colonisation in northern Europe was produced by the Scandinavian Research Project on Deserted Farms and Villages in the 1960s and 1970s and outlined in its final report from 1981.²⁷ It should be noted that this project was subdivided nationally. Consequently, its results can best be summed up with reference to the present borders of the Scandinavian states.

Norway was examined particularly thoroughly in this project, with some twenty local case studies from Rogaland in the south to southern Troms in the north, which have later been supplemented by new studies along the same lines. This has made it possible to estimate the extent of the desertion of farms and holdings across the whole country.

According to the latest estimate there were about 37,800 named farms within the present-day borders of Norway at the beginning of the fourteenth century, containing some 64,000 holdings; the number of the latter has, however, also

²⁷ Gissel et al. (eds). *Desertion and Land Colonization*.

been estimated at about 75,000.²⁸ A named farm could be identical with a family holding but it could also be subdivided into two or more family holdings.

The late medieval loss of population led to large-scale abandonment of farms and holdings. According to the final report of the Norwegian investigations of the Scandinavian Research Project more than half of the named farms (c. 56 per cent) within the present-day borders of Norway and even more of the holdings (c. 61–2 per cent), may have been deserted. However, the extent of desertion varied from district to district. Hardest hit were districts with limited opportunities for agriculture, such as the innermost, high-lying parts of Østlandet, Vestlandet and Trøndelag. Abandonment rates for named farms could here amount to 80 per cent or more; in exceptional cases local communities were totally deserted. At the other extreme, less than 30 per cent of the farms were abandoned in the fertile islands just north of Stavanger where the climate was favourable for agriculture and access to the riches of the sea was easy.

The difference between coastal and inland districts was quite general and probably had most to do with agricultural conditions. Abandonment rates well above the average were common in marginal settlements high up the valleys, on the mountain slopes, and in the inner fjords, while rates below 50 per cent have been calculated on good soils all the way along the coast from Oslofjord to Helgeland in north Norway. The possibilities offered by fishing also tended to limit the desertion of farms in coastal areas, particularly so from Vestlandet northwards where coastal settlements in some cases coped better than more favourable agricultural districts further inland. On the outer coast of Trøndelag, for instance, the abandonment rate in Osen and Roan was c. 39 per cent as compared with c. 47 per cent in the far more fertile agricultural district of Inderøy at the head of Trondheimsfjord. The latter rate was, however, also comparatively low, showing that the good agricultural conditions in the low-lying inland areas of Trøndelag and Østlandet enabled settlements to survive better than in agriculturally poorer inland districts.

Between the coastal areas and the innermost mountain and fjord districts there was in various regions an intermediate zone of agricultural districts, often forested, where settlement generally survived somewhat better than further inland or higher up, but not so well as in the best agricultural districts.

28 L. Marthinsen, 'Maksimum og minimum: Norsk busetnadshistorie etter DNØ', in K. Haarstad et al. (eds.), *Innsikt og utsyn: Festskrift til Jørn Sandnes* (Trondheim, 1996), pp. 153, 157; Sandnes and Salvesen, *Ødegårdstid*, p. 61; K. Lunden, 'Gardar, bruk og menneske i høgmellomalderen', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 58 (Oslo, 1979), p. 135; Helle, 'Down to 1536', pp. 34–35.

The differences between the three zones are particularly striking in Rogaland which can be viewed as a microcosm of Norway itself. Abandonment rates in the comparatively flat and agriculturally very favourable coastal area were 40–45 per cent, rising above 50 per cent in less favoured settlements further inland, and reaching an average of about 65 per cent in the innermost region with the poorest agricultural conditions.²⁹

In contrast with the general trend in the coastal area, desertion of farms was marked in the immediate vicinity of the towns of Oslo, Trondheim, Bergen and Stavanger. This may partly have to do with the rather late establishment of a number of small farms on poor agricultural land, and, partly with the tendency of people to move into the towns in times of prolonged crisis. Moreover, land owners in the towns often chose to work deserted farms in the nearby countryside on their own account instead of renting them out anew at the extremely low rents obtainable in the late Middle Ages. In the built-up urban areas empty building sites resulted from the population losses so that land prices in Oslo, for instance, declined markedly.³⁰

In Norway, as elsewhere in Scandinavia, the absence of suitable sources makes it difficult to grasp the chronology of depopulation and settlement contraction. The crisis has left early traces in the form of a sudden drop in farm and land prices over much of the country immediately after 1350; prices remained low throughout the fifteenth century and in some cases declined even further after that. The data available on land rents come from a slightly later period and point to a marked decline which continued until the sixteenth century; only in northern Norway did rents start to rise again as early as the mid-fifteenth century. Although no information is available on the extent of the desertion of farms in Norway before 1430 it is evident that the process must have started much earlier. But the facts, especially trends in prices and land rents, point to the decades of the mid-fifteenth century as the period when economic recession and desertion of farms were at their worst throughout the country. It may be, however, that the crisis first culminated in the coastal areas of Trøndelag and most of northern Norway and Vestlandet and that conditions had reached a stable state by the mid-fifteenth century or perhaps even earlier. After that time measures were taken to recolonise deserted areas, as clearly evidenced in the Trondenes area of southern Troms. In the inland

29 Sandnes and Salvesen, *Ødegårdstid*, pp. 64–93; L. I Hansen (ed.), *Seinmiddelalder i norske bygder: Utvalgte emner fra Det nordiske ødegårdsprosjekts norske punktundersøkelser* (Oslo, 1981); Marthinsen, 'Maksimum og minimum', pp. 157–69; Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, pp. 30–3.

30 Sandnes and Salvesen, *Ødegårdstid*, pp. 87–8; B. Teitsson, 'Geographical variables', in Gissel et al., *Desertion and Land Colonization*, pp. 180–1; A. Nedkvitne and P. Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg* (Oslo bys historie, 1, Oslo, 1991), pp. 339–41.

areas of Østlandet and the inner parts of Trøndelag and Jämtland it seems that the crisis assumed its most serious proportions later than in the west and north and continued for slightly longer; it may not have culminated until the end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. At least there are no signs of recovery until the first half of the sixteenth century. With the exception of Østlandet, settlement in Norway seems to have almost regained its maximum level of the high Middle Ages by 1660.³¹

The project on deserted farms and villages has served to reinforce the traditional notion in Norwegian historical research that the crisis of the late Middle Ages was in fact one single process, the direct cause of which was the drastic population loss inflicted by the Black Death and subsequent outbreaks of plague. The immediate effects of this were a serious lack of labour and a slump in the demand for goods. In the longer run the demographic crisis had a selective impact on settlement. Small individual farms, the numbers of which had increased vigorously in the high Middle Ages, suffered heavily everywhere. Depopulation particularly affected newly colonised districts in the forests and hills, in the inner fjords, and in the more remote valleys and mountains, as well as farms on the margins of older agricultural settlements. In general, the loss of population led to a reversion of the expansion of settlement that had taken place up to and including the high Middle Ages; it was the oldest and best farms that had the best chance of surviving.

On the other hand, the evidence of an agrarian crisis before the mid-fourteenth century in several parts of Europe and the longevity of the crisis in Norway have led Norwegian historians to explore whether there were other causes besides plague for the dramatic late medieval contraction of settlement. Attention has been drawn to the somewhat colder and damper climate which set in from the latter half of the thirteenth century. The most recent climatic research indicates that the period 1340–65 was particularly cold in Scandinavia, and that cold conditions continued at least until 1390. The climate became more favourable in the first half of the fifteenth century but was again more unstable in the latter half.³² Colder conditions may well have contributed to the abandonment of high-lying farms, especially in the inland areas, which were susceptible to frost and often also had poor soils.

It has further been suggested that the causes of desertion include soil exhaustion due to over-exploitation, high land rents, and the heavy burden of taxes and duties. So far the effects of these are largely hypothetical. It is certainly

31 E. Kårstad, 'Ødegarder og oppgangstid i Trondenes', in *Seinmiddelalder i norske bygder*, p. 462; Sandnes og Salvesen, *Ødegårdstid*, pp. 161–2.

32 Briffa et al., 'A 1,400-year tree-ring record', pp. 437–9.

possible that the high medieval expansion in the form of population growth, clearing of new holdings and subdivision of old farms had already stopped and reverted to a regression towards the end of that period. Nevertheless, recorded indications of crisis in Norway before 1350 are few and weak. The major disruption of Norwegian society no doubt came later, with the Black Death and the subsequent outbreaks of plague.

Less dramatic settlement development in the rest of western and southern Scandinavia

Regional differences in the process of settlement contraction were much greater in Denmark than in Norway, and its chronology is more difficult to grasp. Although abandonment of settlements in general appears to have been less extensive and continued for a shorter period of time, it was nevertheless a clear feature of the late medieval development of Danish society.

The trend was most pronounced in southern Jylland where the infertile heathland of the Vojens area west of Haderslev was completely deserted. Further south there was extensive desertion west of Åbenrå, though less widespread than at Vojens. Small marginal villages were completely deserted or had only a few inhabitants remaining. On the west coast half of the farms in an area close to Ribe were deserted, particularly small farms.³³

The abandonment of settlements was much less marked, only about 10–20 per cent of them, on fertile soils near Århus in the northern part of Jylland and in the islands of Sjælland, Falster and Fyn. On the islands desertion was most pronounced in the inland areas where a large number of fairly young, in most cases small, villages and farms were deserted and their land used for grazing. Settlement was best preserved on good agricultural land, particularly on the coast, where fishing and trading gained an important place in the economy. In the hundred of Horn in northern Sjælland the rate of abandonment was around 40 per cent in the interior but remained around 10 per cent on average. At the same time as inland farms were abandoned new farms were established on the coast.³⁴

Indications of a crisis can be observed before 1350 in many areas, such as in the *herred* of Horn, but the abandonment process seems to have reached its climax between 1375 and 1410. It was accompanied by a decline in land rents to

33 J. Sandnes, 'Settlement developments in the Late Middle Ages', in Gissel et al., *Desertion and Land Colonization*, pp. 81–2.

34 Ibid., pp. 82–4; Gissel (ed.), *Hornsherredundersøgelsen* (København, 1977), p. 175, 298–9, 315; Gissel (ed.), *Falsterundersøgelsen*, 1, pp. 358–9, 367–8, 373–4.

no more than one-third of their previous level. Resettlement promoted by the Crown had already commenced in some places by the end of the fourteenth century but happened mainly after the mid-fifteenth century when the crisis seems mostly to have been overcome. It was accompanied by a change in settlement structure which involved centralisation in the form of larger farms or villages and the establishment of more settlements in coastal areas and on the islands.³⁵ On Fyn, for example, where one farm in five had been abandoned at the end of the fourteenth century, only some 5 per cent were still unoccupied in 1450 and only 1–2 per cent by 1500. The settlements that remained deserted the longest were those located in flat areas which had access to extensive arable land but no forests, meadows or fishing waters.³⁶

The agrarian crisis which manifested itself in Denmark in the form of a decline in land prices and production in the early decades of the fourteenth century continued throughout the late Middle Ages, and the drift of population away from the land persisted. The crisis was seriously aggravated by the population losses and the lack of labour caused by plague epidemics and wars and was at its worst in the period 1350–1420.³⁷ The colder climate and the occurrence of floods (e.g. a severe storm and flood at Schleswig in 1362) also contributed to the abandonment of land, particularly in Jylland.

Much less is known about late medieval settlement trends in Sweden than in Norway because of the scarcity of sources and the less extensive geographical range of research. Nevertheless, it is clear that the agrarian crisis was serious, though presumably much less so than in Norway. It should, however, be noted that the retrospective method used extensively in Norwegian research to establish the high medieval maximum of farms could not be applied in the investigations of Swedish and Danish settlement development within the Research Project on Deserted Farms and Villages.³⁸ This means that the estimates of the high medieval maximum in Swedish and Danish districts tend to be based on minimum figures in contrast to the corresponding Norwegian estimates, and the same goes for abandonment rates.

At any rate, there were significant regional differences in the degree of desertion in the central and southern parts of present-day Sweden. The effect

35 Gissel (ed.), *Falsterundersøgelsen*, p. 368; Gissel (ed.), *Hornsherredundersøgelsen*, pp. 313–14; Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 339–41.

36 E. Porsmose, *De fynske landsbyers historie – i dyrkningsfællesskabets tid* (Odense, 1987), p. 78; Porsmose, 'Middelalder', p. 339.

37 Christensen, 'Ændringerne', pp. 258–349; Ulsig, 'Den senmiddelalderlige agrarkrise', p. 221.

38 E. Österberg, 'Methods, hypotheses and study areas', in Gissel et al., *Desertion and Land Colonization*, pp. 31–50.

was particularly pronounced in Småland and the province of Bohuslän (then part of Norway) where 30–40 per cent of the settlements, mostly small villages and scattered individual farms, were abandoned. It was also quite marked by Swedish standards in western Värmland where 16–21 per cent of the medieval settlements were still unoccupied in the mid-sixteenth century.³⁹ In the other areas examined within the Research Project (Närke, Västergötland, and Södermanland) the abandonment rates by 1550 have been estimated at only 5–10 per cent. It has, however, been impossible to verify in every case whether this low percentage is due to limited desertion or to inadequate recording of deserted farms in surviving sources. In Skåne, the most fertile area in the whole of Scandinavia and at that time part of Denmark, abandonment was limited and the pattern of settlement remained stable.⁴⁰

In the northern part of Sweden the rate of abandonment was in the range of 30–40 per cent in Jämtland, then part of Norway, in contrast to the situation in Hälsingland to the east where there are indications of no more than a very slight movement away from the countryside; this may, however, again be attributable to a lack of reliable sources. There is at any rate evidence of the effects of the Great Plague and of serious impoverishment among the population.⁴¹

The chronology of late medieval settlement desertion in Sweden is not clear. Data on deserted farms are available mainly from the 1430s, although the process must have begun earlier. There is some information on land prices and rents in the second half of the fourteenth century and it can be seen that they declined considerably at the beginning of the fifteenth century. For the rest of that century they remained fairly stable in many places or had at least evened out by the 1460s (e.g. in the lands of the monastery of Vadstena). Land rents must have begun to rise again around 1500 at the latest.⁴²

In many provinces in southern Sweden the main period of desertion was in the decades following 1450 and reoccupation of deserted farms commenced mainly after the turn of the next century. Sources for determining the Swedish chronology of abandonment are best in Småland. Here desertion was particularly marked during three periods: the second half of the fourteenth century,

39 Österberg, *Kolonisation*, pp. 118–19.

40 J. Brunius, *Bondebygd i förändring: Bebyggelse och befolkning i Västra Närke ca. 1300–1600* (Lund, 1980), pp. 34–89; O. Skarin, *Grängsgårdar i centrum, 1* (*Studier i västsvensk bebyggelsehistoria ca. 1300–1600*, Göteborg, 1979), pp. 111–19; Sandnes, 'Settlement developments', p. 91.

41 Brink, 'Den senmedeltida agrarkrisen', pp. 39–44.

42 L.-A. Norborg, *Storföretaget Vadstena kloster* (Lund, 1958), pp. 218–26; Larsson, *Det medeltida Varend*, pp. 161–6; Bååth, *Öde sedan*, pp. 91–3, 130.

the 1420s, and the 1450s and 1460s. Later it was felt occasionally at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries until resettlement started in the 1530s. In the first two periods abandonment of farms was long-lasting and accompanied by structural changes in agriculture.⁴³

In Småland it seems clear that the decline was precipitated by the Black Death. In other Swedish provinces many documents mention the 'Great Death' as a cause of the desertion of farms and the halving of property prices.⁴⁴ Population losses from the second half of the fourteenth century until the 1520s may have been partly a result of the union wars and periods of unrest and devastation caused by Danish military expeditions in the border regions. It has also been suggested that climatic deterioration made grain-growing more difficult and led to widespread desertion in the period 1460–1500, especially in Västergötland, and that this was accompanied by increased emphasis on dairy farming, high taxes and unfavourable economic trends. Nevertheless, Swedish depopulation and desertion throughout the late Middle Ages may be largely attributable to major outbreaks of plague, which after the Black Death were particularly severe in 1420–2, also years of crop failure, and in 1464–6.⁴⁵

There are indications that Småland became over-populated in the high Middle Ages. The area had a large number of very small farms, which would tend to promote late medieval abandonment, particularly in remote areas. Present-day Sweden resembles Norway and Denmark in that more farms were abandoned inland than on the western coast where settlement had even expanded, perhaps on account of fishing. A structural change in settlement and cultivation similar to that which occurred in Denmark seems to have taken place in some Swedish areas too; people largely gave up working the peripherally located small farms with poor soils and took over the larger farms or combined small ones into larger entities. Arable land gave way to pastures and animal production increased, but from the fifteenth century grain production again expanded as resettlement and colonisation gained ground.

We have seen that the Black Death did not reach Iceland where there was no extensive and long-lasting decline in settlement. Research carried out in northern and eastern Iceland has indicated that there was nevertheless a limited abandonment of farms in 1420–50 and 1495–1550 when some 20–25 per cent of the farms were deserted. The effect was particularly notable on the

43 Norborg, *Storföretaget Vadstena*, p. 186; Bååth, *Öde sedan*, p. 141; Österberg, *Kolonisation*, pp. 120–2; Brunius, *Bondebygd*, pp. 34–89; Skarin, *Grängsgårdar*, pp. 111–19, 176–82.

44 Bååth, *Öde sedan*, pp. 130, 141–2; Larsson, *Småländsk medeltid*, pp. 178–9; *Diplomatarium Suecanum*, 6, no. 4925; Norborg, 'Pest', col. 248; Österberg, *Kolonisation*, p. 123.

45 Brunius, *Bondebygd*, pp. 34–89; Skarin, *Grängsgårdar*, pp. 111–19, 176–82; Bååth, *Öde sedan*, pp. 143–4; Larsson, *Det medeltida Västergötland*, p. 179.

coast but it was temporary and probably caused by outbreaks of plague in 1402–4 and 1494–5. In the fifteenth century climatic deterioration should also be taken into account. The westernmost parts of Iceland, on the other hand, saw population growth and settlement expansion from about 1300 and show no signs of recession at all in the three following centuries. This was probably connected with fishing and the production of dried fish.⁴⁶

Since the Viking Age, Norse settlement in Greenland had been concentrated in two areas on the south-western seaboard, the Western Settlement, where 74 medieval farms are known to have existed, and the larger, more southerly Eastern Settlement, so far known to have comprised 438 farms.⁴⁷ The Norse Greenlanders subsisted on animal husbandry, hunting and fishing, and imported all their grain.

The more northerly Western Settlement was abandoned within a fairly short period in the mid-fourteenth century, presumably on account of the fall in temperatures which created difficulties for farming as well as for hunting and fishing. It is likely that at least some of the inhabitants moved to the Eastern Settlement, which would have increased the pressure on the resources there.⁴⁸

The Eastern Settlement lost population over a longer period of time towards the end of the fifteenth century and was possibly dealt its death blow by the spread of plague from Iceland, though this has not been verified. The primary reasons were probably interruption of trade, consequent isolation, and, most of all, collapse of the main sources of livelihood. A more windy, rainy, and cold climate hampered the collection of cattle fodder and interfered with fishing even in the Eastern Settlement. Recent investigations have demonstrated convincingly that the fertility of the soil was ultimately destroyed by climatically caused erosion and overgrazing of pastures and meadows.⁴⁹ In the face of incipient starvation many of the people may have moved to Iceland.

Colonisation in the eastern and northern parts of Scandinavia

Research into late medieval settlement in Finland is hampered by the scarcity of written sources but it can nevertheless be asserted that expansion was the

46 Sandnes, 'Settlement developments', pp. 101–2, 238; Stefánsson, 'Iceland', p. 312.

47 Berglund, 'The decline', pp. 129–34.

48 Ibid., pp. 117, 125.

49 Ibid., pp. 122–7; B. U. Hansen, 'Using climate and vegetation studies in southern Greenland to estimate the natural resources during the Norse Period', *Acta Borealia*, 8 (1991), p. 54; B. H. Jacobsen, 'Soil resources and soil erosion in the Norse settlement area of Østerbygden in Southern Greenland', *ibid.*, pp. 66–8.

major trend. Desertion was negligible; in Häme and Finland Proper only c. 2–3 per cent of the farms in a few parishes were affected in the 1430s and the 1470s and 1480s.⁵⁰

For the most part settlement expanded even in Finland Proper in the late Middle Ages, although the trend was more marked elsewhere, i.e. in Satakunta, Häme, Karelia, Savo, and particularly in Österbotten in northern Finland. Old farms were divided or used to establish daughter settlements in tracts of nearby wilderness, and colonisation of new, more remote areas was also widespread. Karelian settlement expanded particularly in the Isthmus area of southern Karelia and in north Karelia, while a major trend in the north was the colonisation of the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia and its large river valleys, mostly by people from south-west Finland and Karelia.⁵¹ Colonisation was presumably influenced by the royal Swedish settlement policy of that time, particularly that of the kings Magnus Eriksson and Erik of Pomerania, using pioneer settlements as a means of binding politically unstable areas more closely to the kingdom in order to strengthen its position in relation to Novgorod and Moscow and increase its tax revenues.

On the other hand, the process of establishing settlements in the wilderness areas of the interior and north of Finland, begun spontaneously by the people of Savo in the second half of the fifteenth century, continued well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and, from the 1540s, was encouraged by King Gustaf Vasa for political and economic reasons. The people of Savo used the *huuhta* (slash and burn) cultivation technique in the spruce-dominated woodlands to yield clearings that gave magnificent harvests, thirty- to fortyfold and sometimes even hundredfold yields, but only for the first couple of years. Then harvests declined and new clearings had to be made for cultivation. In order to find better *huuhta* forests it was often necessary to abandon one's house and lay claim to a new site. The colonists from Savo also gained a great part of their livelihood from cattle-rearing, hunting and fishing.⁵²

It was common for late medieval farmers in Finland to rely on various means of subsistence, the more so the further east and north the farms were located, which would help to make settlements more permanent. Population growth and settlement expansion were also helped by tolerable climatic conditions

50 E. Orrman, *Bebyggelsen i Pargas, S:t Mårtens och Vemo socknar i Egentliga Finland under senmedeltiden och på 1500-talet* (Vammala, 1986), pp. 59–60, 196.

51 E. Orrman, 'The progress of settlement in Finland during the late Middle Ages', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 29 (1981), pp. 133, 136–7; J. Vahtola, 'The rise of settlement on the coast of Northern Ostrobothnia', in K. Julku (ed.), *Suomen varhaishistoria* (Jyväskylä, 1992), pp. 613–21.

52 E. Jutikkala, 'The way up', in Gissel et al., *Desertion and Land Colonization*, pp. 133–5.

(compared with those from the end of the sixteenth century and throughout the following century), the small number of epidemics, relatively low taxes, and a long period of peace during the Nordic Kalmar Union. Raids carried out from Novgorod or Moscow occasionally caused serious damage to settlements in Karelia, as they also did at fairly frequent intervals in northern Österbotten throughout the fifteenth century, but reconstruction followed immediately. Altogether it can be estimated that the number of farms in Finland at least doubled between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries so that the above-mentioned number of some 34,000 taxable farms had been reached by 1560.

In northern Sweden Finnish settlement had already been established by the beginning of the fourteenth century as far as the Tornio valley. At this time intensive Swedish colonisation started in Norrland, promoted by the Crown. It is likely that occasional pioneer settlements continued to be formed throughout the late Middle Ages, though this cannot be directly verified, and there are no references to the abandonment of settlements. The ethnic border between Swedes and Finns became settled between the Kalix and Tornio rivers.⁵³

In northern Norway abandonment of settlement has been demonstrated up to Trondenes near Harstad, but north- and eastwards from there, in Troms and Finnmark, Norse settlement was on the increase as early as the thirteenth century and expansion seems to have continued as far as Vardø in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The settlements were located on the coast and fishing formed the basis of their existence. Their development was disturbed by raids of Karelians and Russians organised by Novgorod throughout the late Middle Ages. On occasions these raids reached as far as the Lofoten Islands but the abandonment of settlements resulting from them was only temporary.⁵⁴

Late medieval growth of settlement in northern Scandinavia was matched by a similar process in Russia where settlement expanded continuously despite minor setbacks caused by outbreaks of plague. Extensive colonisation affected the areas surrounding Novgorod from the mid-fifteenth century until the 1560s, followed by settlement contraction from the 1570s, as in Finland.⁵⁵ As regards the Baltic region information from the fifteenth century points to substantial abandonment of farms, thus associating the area more with the agrarian crisis of central Europe.

53 H. Sundström, *Bönder bryter bygd* (Lund, 1984), pp. 35–54.

54 Kårstad, 'Ødegarder', pp. 468, 470–1.

55 Orrman, 'Huomioita myöhäiskeskiajan asutustaantumista', pp. 24–5; C. Goehrke, *Die Wüstungen in Moskauer Russ* (Wiesbaden, 1968), pp. 80–92, 108–13.

On the whole, the period 1350–1500 was a regressive phase in the history of settlement in Scandinavia and most clearly so in Norway. In Greenland the Norse colonies were completely abandoned while desertion of farms was less pronounced in Iceland. In Finland, on the other hand, colonisation continued and the number of farms tripled. Finland remained a province of Sweden but its economic and political weight within that kingdom was growing. There was also growth in settlement in the northern parts of Sweden and Norway. Southern Scandinavia, i.e. the kingdom of Denmark and the central parts of present-day Sweden, held an intermediate position between these two extremes. Settlement declined over large parts of the area but desertion was much less marked than in Norway, varying between 10 and 40 per cent of the settlements depending on time and place.

The dramatic contraction of settlement in Norway was mainly due to the population losses caused by the Black Death and later outbreaks of plague. Population losses were also the most important factor behind the abandonment of farms and villages in the other Scandinavian countries; in southern Scandinavia the many wars of the period added to the effects of the plague epidemics. Finland and the northernmost parts of Norway and Sweden probably escaped the ravages of the Black Death and the worst of the other outbreaks of plague.

Natural catastrophes could in some cases lead to abandonment of farms but a more important factor was the deteriorating climate accompanied by frequent famine years which made conditions in general more difficult. Climatic conditions were particularly important in marginal areas for agriculture, such as Greenland, Iceland and high-lying districts of Norway. But the colder and damper climate also shortened the growing season and made life more difficult in wide areas of southern Scandinavia where grain cultivation was very important. Climatic deterioration was less of a problem in Finland where the greater diversification of the economy made it easier to withstand crises. Fishing and hunting were still the crucial activities, particularly in the newly colonised areas, and also played a major role in northernmost Norway and Sweden. Animal husbandry was also important in the north, favoured as it was by ample natural meadows in the extensive valleys and low-lying coastal districts.

The structure of settlement itself was an important determinant of settlement contraction. A dominant single-farm structure was more characteristic of settlement in the medieval Norwegian kingdom than in the other Scandinavian kingdoms where the majority of farms were concentrated in villages and hamlets or in groups of farms. It may be that the separate

Norwegian farms and holdings with their small households of mainly nuclear families were more vulnerable than farms situated in villages, hamlets or groups where the neighbouring farms and the greater number of people available could help to relieve the difficulties caused by population losses.

It should, however, also be noted, as shown above, that late medieval desertion of farms is easier to detect in the single-farm structure of Norway than in the village and hamlet districts of the other kingdoms where the settlement structure has obscured the traces of desertion left in surviving sources. In addition, there are the methodological differences mentioned between medieval settlement research in present-day Norway on the one hand and Denmark and Sweden on the other, which tend to produce high numbers of desertion in Norway and minimum numbers in the other countries. It may thus well be that the degrees of settlement contraction registered in Norwegian and other Scandinavian countries were in reality less strikingly different than they seem to be at the present stage of research.

The condition of the rural population

ELJAS ORRMAN

The decline and stagnation in settlement caused by the Black Death and the ensuing plague epidemics led to various kinds of crisis phenomena in rural societies throughout central, western and southern Europe. This is the reason why the term 'late medieval agrarian crisis' has been coined to describe the period from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries, though the grounds for using it have also been questioned. The effects of population losses and settlement contraction varied considerably among the European countries but certain structural changes occurred in most parts of Europe. As shown above (Chapter 18) rural society in Scandinavia was also marked by the repercussions of a dramatic loss of population well into the second half of the fifteenth century when the first signs of recovery manifested themselves in some areas.

The decrease of population led to great economic and social changes, set in motion by the attempts of different groups to adapt to and take advantage of the new situation. Developments in the Nordic countries were in some respects similar to those in the rest of Europe but many differences can also be noted. As Scandinavia was neither economically nor socially a homogeneous area before the mid-fourteenth century the results and effects of the population loss also varied considerably within the region.

Ownership and possession of land

The forms of land holding greatly influenced the development of rural society in the late Middle Ages. The relation between freehold land and privileged land was particularly important, the latter being land held by the nobility and ecclesiastical institutions and exempted from royal taxation. This was, however, a relation that remained remarkably constant, not least because of measures taken by the Crown from the latter half of the fourteenth century to prevent freehold farms from falling into the possession of the nobility or the Church.

Recurrent inquiries concerning the legal status of landed property were made in Denmark, Sweden and Finland, and often resulted in confiscations of property by the Crown or the restitution of freehold farms that had been obtained by the nobility to their former owners, as happened, for instance, in the 1390s and the first decade of the fifteenth century.¹

The proportions of land owned by nobles and the Church in the late Middle Ages changed in favour of the latter as a result of bequests, donations and purchases. It has been estimated that the land held by Danish nobles decreased by about 10 per cent in the late Middle Ages, while in Norway the Church increased its share of land, in terms of value, from approximately 40 per cent to 48 per cent, and the share held by nobles decreased from about 20 per cent to 15 per cent.²

In contrast to the Danish and Swedish kingdoms the tenant farms of nobles and the Church in Norway were not exempt from royal taxation. Consequently, the Crown had little interest in limiting the amount of tenanted land held by the Church and aristocrats. There were, however, attempts by Queen Margrethe around the turn of the fifteenth century to reclaim some landed property that noblemen had received as gifts from the Crown.³

It is not possible to determine the proportions of land held by different categories of owners until the close of the Middle Ages (see Table 19.1).⁴ These figures are not completely comparable, since the basis of calculation varies. The Danish and Finnish percentages are based on numbers of farms and do not take account of the fact that manors held by the nobility and the Church

1 G. Dahlbäck, *Uppsala domkyrkas godsinnnehav med särskild hänsyn till perioden 1344–1527* (Studier till Det medeltida Sverige, 2, Uppsala, 1977), pp. 375–7; E. Anthoni, *Finlands medeltida frälse och 1500-talsadel* (Helsingfors, 1970), p. 190; E. Porsmose, 'Middelalder o. 1000–1536', in C. Bjørn (ed.), *Det danske landbrugs historie*, 1 (Odense, 1988), p. 381.

2 H. Bjørkvik, *Folketap og sammenbrudd 1350–1520* (K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norgeshistorie*, 4, Oslo, 1996), pp. 63, 83.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 55–7.

4 For Denmark: E. Ulsig, 'Landownership', in P. Pulsiano, *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1993), p. 375; C. Porskrog Rasmussen, 'Kronens gods', in P. Ingesman and J. V. Jensen (eds.), *Danmark i senmiddelalderen* (Århus, 1993), p. 72. For Norway: J. Sandnes, 'Mannedauden og de overlevende', in K. Mykland (ed.), *Norges historie*, 4 (Oslo, 1977), pp. 200–1; cf. H. Bjørkvik, 'Nyare forskning i norsk seinmellomalder', in *Nytt fra norsk middelalder*, 2 (Norsk lektorlags faglig-pedagogiske skrifter, 10, Oslo, 1970), p. 88. For Iceland: K. Hastrup, *Nature and Policy in Iceland 1400–1800: An Anthropological Analysis of History and Mentality* (Oxford, 1980), p. 93. *Föroyar*: J. Elsøe Jensen, 'La pauvrete dans les Iles Féroé', in T. Riis (ed.), *Aspects of Poverty in Early Modern Europe* (Odense Studies in History and Social Sciences, Odense, 1990), p. 37. For Sweden: L.-O. Larsson, 'Jordägo fördelningen i Sverige under Gustaf Vasas regering', *Scandia*, 51 (1985), pp. 68–76; O. Ferm, *De högdagliga godsens i Sverige vid 1500-talets mitt* (Studier till Det medeltida Sverige, 4, Stockholm, 1990), pp. 24–5, 196–7, 388, 432. For Finland: E. Orrman, 'Den världsliga frälsejordens lokalisering i Finland under medeltiden och 1500-talet', in H. Ilse and B. Jørgensen (eds.), *Plov og pen: Festskrift til Svend Gissel 4. januar 1991* (København, 1991), p. 138.

Table 19.1 *Estimated distribution of landed property (per cent), 1520s–1530s*

Realm and region	Freehold	Crown	Nobility	Church
Danish realm	c. 15	10–12	35–40	35–40
Norwegian realm				
Norway	30	7	15	48
Iceland	53	2	—	45
Føroyar	c. 50	—	—	c. 50
Swedish realm ^a	(62)	(4)	(17)	(17)
Sweden	45	6	24	25
Finland	93	1	3	3

Note: ^a The figures in brackets refer to the Swedish Kingdom as a whole.

Source: See note 4.

were usually considerably larger than the average farm. From the Swedish percentages more than 400 tax-exempted residential farms are excluded, corresponding to approximately 1,200–1,500 average farms. The Norwegian figures give the shares of the various owner categories in terms of real or potential land rent, for which all land had been valued in order to establish a basis of taxation. The Icelandic percentages are also based on taxation assessments. Relations between these categories varied considerably within each country and within smaller regions as well.

The figures show that nobles and the Church were the dominant landowners in Denmark at the end of the Middle Ages, possessing together 75 per cent of the farms, but there were districts in the peripheral forested areas where freehold farms could amount to 50 per cent of the total.⁵

In Norway there were distinct freehold regions where the majority of holdings were owned by farmers. Telemark and Agder in the south constituted the largest such region but the situation was similar in smaller areas in other parts of the country, especially in the eastern mountain valleys leading towards Vestlandet and in Jämtland in present-day Sweden. Conversely, the proportion of freehold land was particularly low in the best farming regions near the coast, especially around the main towns. In the northern fishing regions north of 65°N freehold land was the exception and ecclesiastical institutions predominated as landowners. The nobility, too, had considerable possessions in these northern regions.

⁵ Porsmose, 'Middelalder', p. 348.

In northern Sweden, on the other hand, freehold farms completely predominated; no less than 90 per cent of the farms in Norrland and Dalarna were peasant-owned. The proportion of freehold farms was lowest, only 17–19 per cent, south of Lake Mälaren in Södermanland and Östergötland. In these regions 60–75 per cent of all landed property was in the possession of the nobility and Church. Östergötland had the highest proportion of church-owned land in the realm (c. 40 per cent) while the nobility owned the same proportion in Södermanland. Church and nobility also predominated as landowners in the fertile farming regions of Uppland and Västmanland north of Lake Mälaren, but freehold was widespread in the more peripheral archipelago and forest regions so that 43–50 per cent of the total number of farms in the two provinces were peasant-owned. In the southern provinces of medieval Sweden the proportion of noble-owned land amounted to more than one-third.

The manors of the Swedish nobility were situated both in central rural regions such as the Mälar area, albeit often in outlying locations, and in peripheral regions such as Småland. The greatest concentrations of church-owned property were to be found around episcopal towns and larger monasteries.

With over 90 per cent of all farms in peasant ownership freehold land was predominant in Finland, although even there regional differences occurred. Church- and noble-owned land was concentrated in the south-west, in Finland Proper (Varsinais-Suomi) and also in certain parts of Uusimaa (Nyland) where most of the manors of the nobility were situated. In Finland Proper the Church and nobility owned 16 per cent of the farms at the close of the Middle Ages but less than 7 per cent in Uusimaa. There was a concentration of such land around the centre of Finnish secular and ecclesiastical administration, the episcopal town of Åbo. In certain parishes near the town the proportion of freehold farms was only 60–70 per cent. Characteristic of land ownership in the western provinces of Finland was the fact that the uninhabited wilderness regions (*erämark*), often up to 200–300 kilometres from the home villages and hamlets of their holders, were in private ownership. Freehold peasants owned most of these tracts but the nobility, too, had important possessions there.

The percentages of land held by various categories of owners do not give an entirely reliable picture of the actual conditions of land ownership. In particular, it should be noted that not all freehold farms were owned by those who worked them. Even though this was the case for the vast majority in Sweden and Finland, it was not uncommon for rich farmers to own freehold farms in addition to those they worked themselves, and to rent them out to tenants. This also applied to burghers who obtained freehold farms in the vicinity of towns. Conditions were similar in Denmark where rich farmers could own

several freehold farms.⁶ In Norway, too, rich farmers owned freehold farms which they rented out to tenants, but there was also a widespread system of part ownership by which only part of a holding belonged to the farmer who worked it while the rest was the property of others (see Chapter 10).

Although Iceland lacked a formally privileged nobility, society was dominated by wealthy chieftains who possessed or in other ways held large areas of landed property, comprising much of the 53 per cent of freehold land shown in Table 19.1. In fact, the proportion of Icelandic farmers who owned the land they worked was decreasing throughout the high and late Middle Ages, so that only 5 per cent of the farms were owned by their farmers at the end of the period. In the fifteenth century, in particular, large complexes of land became the property of a few families. In the 1440s the largest Icelandic landlord possessed more than 3 per cent of the total value of all landed property in the country.⁷

The agrarian economy

As a consequence of the late medieval loss of population the profitability of certain forms of agricultural production decreased radically, destabilising the economy of those involved. On the other hand, large groups of the rural population profited from the changes that occurred in the period of crisis.

In Norway, which has the richest sources of information on the agrarian crisis in Scandinavia, change was most dramatic. The loss of population during the Black Death caused a sharp drop in land prices, which in the mid-fifteenth century and even much later were only 50 per cent or less of that paid before the mid-fourteenth century. Throughout the century following the Black Death there was an even more dramatic fall in land rents, to 20–25 per cent of the pre-plague level. Consequently, the return on capital invested in rented land sank from around 6–7 per cent to only half this figure. Church receipts from the tithe on corn also fell markedly, on average to perhaps not much more than one-fifth of their level before 1350.⁸

In the other Nordic countries information about late medieval changes in land prices and land rents is more limited and difficult to interpret than

6 E. Ulsig, 'Bonde og godsejer ved slutningen af dansk middelalder', in Ingesman and Jensen (eds), *Danmark i senmiddelalderen*, p. 115.

7 B. Þórsteinsson, *Island* (Århus, 1985), pp. 127–8.

8 J. Sandnes and H. Salvesen, *Ødegårdstid i Norge: Det nordiske ødegårdsprosjekts nordiske undersøkelser* (Oslo, 1978), pp. 118–48; S. Dyrvik et al., *Norsk økonomisk historie 1500–1970*, 1 (Bergen, 1979), p. 31; Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, pp. 22–3, 29–30, 60–1.

in Norway. Danish prices and rents dropped distinctly from the high Middle Ages to the second half of the fifteenth century. In Sjælland a strong reduction of land prices can be traced from the 1330s, caused by a decreased interest in landed investments. Consequently, the return on capital invested in land increased from 10 per cent in the preceding period to 15–17 per cent in the 1330–50s. Behind the decreasing land prices were factors such as a strongly increased taxation of tenants, repeated wars, and Holstein occupation of the land – all of them making investments in land more insecure. A reduction of land rents did not take place in Denmark until about 1370, coinciding with the appearance of a larger number of deserted farms in the sources. There is an obvious connection between desertion, caused by the Black Death, and the decrease of land rents. The decline was at its strongest in the three last decades of the fourteenth century, but it appears that there were great variations, and there are many uncertain factors in the estimates of the scope of the crisis. In Sjælland there was a decrease in land rents of c. 57 per cent from the period 1333–57 to the period 1388–1400. In a couple of other areas high medieval rents were reduced by one- and two-thirds, respectively. As in England, the Danish decline appears as a delayed effect of the Black Death.

In Iceland there was a moderate decrease in land rents from the fourteenth century to the beginning of the early Modern Period; the starting point was a return of 5–8 per cent on capital. However, land rents could also rise locally in Iceland. The information available on land prices and rents in Sweden and Finland hardly permits any chronological comparisons. In Swedish Uppland it is possible to follow a declining trend in land prices from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the lowest level in the 1430s, a decade marked by peasant revolts and other disturbances; after that prices rose. In south-west Finland land prices in the same century went on falling until the 1470s; after that there was also here a rising trend.⁹

The crisis phenomena described above primarily affected the great noble and ecclesiastical landowners who were most numerous in Denmark, Norway and central parts of Sweden. They suffered a great loss of income and a severe depreciation of their capital in land, and the same is true, to some degree,

9 S. Gissel, 'Rents and other economic indicators', in S. Gissel et al., *Desertion and Land Colonization in the Nordic Countries c. 1300–1600* (Stockholm, 1981), pp. 160–4; S. Gissel, 'Opsummering og konklusion', in S. Gissel (ed.), *Falsterundersøgelsen*, 1 (Odense, 1989), pp. 363, 369; Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 329, 390; G. Dahlbäck, 'Jord som kapitalplacering', *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift*, 2 (1981), p. 70; E. Orrman, *Bebyggelseutvecklingen i Pargas, S:t Mårtens och Vemo socknar i Egentliga Finland under medeltiden och på 1500-talet* (*Historialisia Tutkimuksia*, 132, Vammala, 1986), pp. 36–9; E. Ulsig, 'Befolkningsfald, landgildefald og jordpriser i det 14. århundrede', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 101 (København, 2001), pp. 9–15.

for the Crown. Not until the sixteenth and, for some, even the seventeenth centuries was the crisis for the great landowners completely overcome.

Most other groups in agrarian society benefited economically from the same developments, though this did not automatically imply that their social and political status developed favourably. The decrease in land rents particularly favoured tenants, as seen most clearly in Denmark and Norway. Hired farm labourers benefited from the rising wages caused by the lack of labour. Freehold farmers did not directly gain any advantages from the fall in land prices and rents, though they could profit from the overall economic trends. They were still subject to royal taxation, which was not reduced for the freeholders who remained after the population decline; rather there were attempts to increase the tax burden per capita in order to compensate for the diminished demographic basis of crown revenues; this was particularly the case in Sweden and Finland.

The late medieval changes advantageous to the peasantry in general had their greatest effect in Norway. As more than half of the high medieval named farms and almost on two-thirds of the family holdings were deserted the high medieval shortage of arable land came to an end. It was possible for farmers of unprofitable small holdings on marginal soils, particularly in high-lying inland regions, to abandon them and become tenants of larger and more viable farms in better agricultural areas (cf. Chapter 18). Both tenants and freeholders gained from the fact that deserted farms could be exploited for grazing and hay-making for little or no rent; thus the average areas exploited by farms and holdings expanded. At the same time there was a clear tendency towards a more extensive system of farming with an increased emphasis on animal husbandry relative to corn growing. The individual farmer did not have to exploit the land as intensively as in the high Middle Ages in order to feed his household and pay the greatly reduced land rents and other dues to Crown and Church. Consequently, the productivity of Norwegian agriculture decreased. At the same time, the sizes of farms and holdings were to some extent equalised by the disappearance of a large number of the smallest high medieval holdings; this meant that rural society became more homogenous.¹⁰

In Denmark noble and ecclesiastical landowners had, after the mid-fourteenth century, to face increasing difficulties in obtaining labour for large-scale farming and tenants for their other farms at acceptable rates of pay and rent. Erik Ulsig has demonstrated that the difficulties did not become pronounced until a couple of decades after the Black Death. The course of action

¹⁰ Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, pp. 42–7.

then increasingly taken by great landowners was to divide the large farms run by leaseholders (Danish *bryde*, cf. Chapter 10) into smaller production units and rent them out to ordinary tenants. In a situation with large numbers of abandoned farms they also began to unite small tenant farms and the minimal holdings of cottagers into considerably larger farming units.¹¹

In this way Danish rural society was restructured from the second half of the fourteenth to the latter half of the fifteenth centuries. High medieval farming units had consisted partly of large leasehold farms with cultivated areas of 15–65 hectares and partly of small tenant farms with 5–6 hectares of fields, only capable of providing subsistence for the farmer's family. In addition there were the small plots of cottagers whose main function was to provide labour. In the late Middle Ages these units gave way to sizable tenant farms, estimated to have had, on average, cultivated areas of around 15 hectares, normally worked under three-course rotation. Tenant farms of this size were uncommon in contemporary Europe; units with corresponding or larger average areas of cultivated land were to be found only in parts of Friesland, the Netherlands and in the areas east of the river Elbe.¹² In villages where all or most of the farms were in the possession of a single owner, so-called 'equalisations' were carried out in the fifteenth century, creating equally large tenant farms of optimum size from an owner's perspective. This also meant that village sites were often given a regular and uniform structure. Great landowners could exploit the situation to their advantage, whereas members of the lower nobility, possessing only a few farms, were hit by the crisis to the extent that many of them had to abandon their noble status.

These developments resulted in a homogenisation of the Danish peasantry which went further than the corresponding development in Norway. The cottagers (*inquilini*) disappeared in the late Middle Ages, mostly by becoming tenants. The large landowners' need for paid labour decreased, but on the other hand the new tenant farms were often too large to be worked solely by the members of the tenant's family and thus required paid labour. As land rents remained at a low level until the close of the Middle Ages the increased size of tenant farms involved significant economic advantages for the tenants.¹³

11 E. Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser i middelalderen* (Skrifter udgivet af Det historiske institut ved Københavns Universitet, København, 1968), pp. 135–51; Ulsig, 'Bonde og godsejer', 111–12.

12 C. A. Christensen, 'Ændringerne i landsbyens økonomiske og sociale struktur i det 14. og 15. århundrede', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 12:4 (København, 1964), pp. 257–316; Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser*, pp. 117–54; J. P. Maarbjerg, *Scandinavia in the European World-Economy, ca 1570–1625* (American University Studies, Series 9, History, 169, New York, 1995), pp. 57–8.

13 Ulsig, 'Bonde og godsejer', pp. 109–12; Porsmose, 'Middelalder', 372–3.

The late medieval agrarian society of Sweden and Finland did not undergo fundamental changes of the type that occurred in Norway and Denmark. In both countries arable land was available throughout the Middle Ages both within and beyond the inhabited areas so that land shortage did not create difficulties for the rural population. Nor did noble and ecclesiastical landownership predominate as it did in Denmark and Norway.

Throughout the Middle Ages agriculture in the Swedish kingdom was mainly carried out as subsistence farming, with holdings worked by the families of single freeholders or tenants, and the general farm structure did not undergo major changes in the late Middle Ages. Freehold and tenant farms did not appreciably differ in size. There is, however, evidence that tenant farms owned by the nobility and Church at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the early Modern Period were in certain Swedish provinces somewhat smaller than freehold farms, on average approximately two-thirds the size. In Finland the tenant farms of the Church and nobility were of the same average size as the freehold farms and in places possibly larger.¹⁴

The late medieval crisis of large-scale farming was also felt in Sweden in the form of rising labour costs, decreased land rents and abandonment of tenant farms. As in Denmark owners of large landed complexes after the mid-fourteenth century reduced large-scale farming and divided their demesnes into tenant farms. In Sweden this development seems to have started already in the first half of the fourteenth century, at least partly because of the reduced supply of labour following the abolition of slavery. Initially the great landowners tried to solve the labour problem by making farm hands cottagers, but in the next phase division of manors became the common solution. The recently established low nobility was particularly hard hit by the agrarian crisis in the second half of the fourteenth century, by which time land-rents may have been reduced by half in the plains of central Sweden, due to rising labour costs. Many members of the low nobility were now forced to abandon their noble status, and joined the upper stratum of the class of freehold farmers. More highly placed and well-to-do landowners could, on their part, take advantage of the lawless situation and collect large amounts of land, often at the cost of the lower nobility, so that many recently established and small manors disappeared. The greatest collector of them all was the *drots* (grand seneschal) Bo Jonsson Grip. Ecclesiastical institutions were also able to exploit the crisis and increase their landed possessions. The great landowners often carried out 'equalisations' of the Danish type, but these measures did not generally, as in

¹⁴ Dahlbäck, *Uppsala domkyrkas godsinnehav*, p. 373; Orrman, *Bebyggelseutvecklingen*, pp. 137–8.

Table 19.2 *Estimated average field sizes of farms worked by freehold and tenant farmers (hectares)*

Denmark	10–20
Norway	1.5–6
Sweden	3–8
Finland	3–5

Denmark, lead to the emergence of larger farms. Finland, where a landed nobility was only starting to emerge, was hardly touched by the above-mentioned developments.¹⁵

In Iceland, which was not struck by plague until 1402–4, the late Middle Ages saw the emergence of a growing number of dependent crofts (*hjáleiga*) on the farms (Chapter 10). Such holdings had already started to appear towards the end of the thirteenth century but they increased with the need for seasonal labour in the late medieval fisheries.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the early Modern Period more information becomes available on the size of tilled farm areas in the Nordic countries (Table 19.2).

The figures in Table 19.2 relate to areas under three- or two-course rotation or continuous cropping. In the central rural regions of Norway, Sweden and Finland the average area under tillage was considerably larger than the mean for the countries as a whole. Accordingly, farms in the Norwegian regions of Østlandet and the environs of Trondheimsfjord had average fields of around 6 hectares towards the end of the Middle Ages. In certain parishes in the Swedish Mälars region and in Östergötland the average cultivated area of a farm could be as much as 9–12 hectares, and in some parishes of southwestern Finland 5–9 hectares. On the other hand, the average size of tillages was considerably smaller in forested areas and regions with limited resources of arable land. In western Norway there were only some 1.5 hectares of arable land available per farming unit. Extremely small tilled areas were also to be found in other parts of Scandinavia, such as in the eastern parts of the Finnish arable farming

¹⁵ Dahlbäck, *Uppsala domkyrkas godsinnnehav*, p. 374; Ferm, *De högadliga godsens*, p. 192; S. Rahmqvist, *Såtesgård och gods: De medeltida frälsegodsens framväxt mot bakgrund av Upplands bebyggelsehistoria*, *Upplands Fornminnesförenings Tidskrift*, 53 (1996), pp. 293–5, 297–8; J. Myrdal, *Jordbruket under feodalismen 1000–1700* (Myrdal (ed.), *Det svenska jordbrukets historia*, 1, Borås 1999), pp. 144–53; Anthoni, *Finlands medeltida frälse och 1500-talsadel*, pp. 114–88, 267–9.

region, where fields amounted to only 1–2 hectares per farm, and in northern Norway and the northernmost agrarian areas of Finland, with less than one hectare per farming unit. In all these areas cereal cultivation was secondary to other activities.

With the exception of Denmark the sizes of farm tillages varied considerably, indicating that rural society was not homogeneous, though it became more so with the abandonment of numerous small holdings in Norway. Within the same region large farms could coexist with small holdings and even cottagers' plots which were too small to provide subsistence for the families concerned; this was true of both freehold and tenant holdings. There is sixteenth-century evidence of this in many places in Sweden where freehold farms could have up to around 20 hectares of cultivated land. In southwestern Finland c. 10 per cent of the freehold farms had at least twice the average of cultivated areas before the mid-sixteenth century; a few of them had even thrice the average, i.e. 10–15 hectares.¹⁶ Farms this size were on a par with the predominant farm category in Denmark.

In Denmark the late medieval transformation of agrarian production units was mostly the result of action taken by the great landowners, i.e. the nobility, Church and Crown. These operated in a similar way in Sweden, too, but with modest results. In Norway, on the other hand, major changes in the structure of agrarian production units took place spontaneously as farmers tried to optimise the new situation of abundant land.

In both Denmark and Norway there was a clear shift of emphasis from cereal cultivation to animal husbandry in the late Middle Ages, caused by changes in demand and prices and helped by the large number of deserted farms which could be utilised for grazing and hay-making. In Denmark both great landowners and farmers took advantage of the growing demand for beef cattle in the Netherlands and north Germany in the fifteenth century and began to raise steers for export. It was mainly the farmers of forested and coastal regions, with better access to fodder resources, who were able to exploit the continental market; their counterparts in the widely and intensively cultivated lowlands lacked these opportunities. This was the reason the former areas were the first to show signs of recovery and growth of settlement after the crisis.¹⁷

In Norway the shortage of labour was the decisive factor behind the increased emphasis on animal husbandry relative to corn growing. Here the

¹⁶ Orrman, *Bebyggelseutvecklingen*, pp. 135–8.

¹⁷ Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 373–6.

personal needs of the farming families were decisive but the shift of production was also influenced by the favourable late medieval price trend for animal products in comparison with grain. In this situation landowners increasingly wanted land rent to be paid in animal products in lieu of grain. There was also a change in Norwegian animal production. While labour-intensive products such as butter and cheese predominated in the high Middle Ages the late medieval focus of production shifted towards meat and hides, requiring considerably less labour, a phenomenon that can also be observed in other parts of contemporary Europe.¹⁸

Affluence through subsidiary means of livelihood

The late Middle Ages saw changes in activities practised alongside farming which were largely advantageous to the rural population, both freeholders and tenants. Auxiliary means of subsistence – primary production as well as commercial undertakings – often permitted farmers to accumulate wealth. The growing demand for fishery products in central and western Europe and the resulting boom in the fish trade was particularly important.

Along the coast of western and northern Norway there was a distinct shift in the geographical focus of settlement. As shown above (Chapter 18) coastal settlements in Norway generally retained a larger percentage of farms/households than inland ones, and this was more marked from Vestlandet northwards where settlements were increasingly dependent on the opportunities offered by fishing. In the late Middle Ages settlement in fishing villages on the outer coast expanded, particularly in the northernmost regions of Troms and Finnmark where it reached as far east as Vadsø. As terms of trade between fishery products and grain favoured the former, arable farming was to a large extent given up in the northern coastal districts where it had earlier been practised while animal husbandry continued in combination with fishing.

Italian seafarers who were shipwrecked on the outer islands of Lofoten in the 1430s have provided informative eye-witness accounts of life in the fishing community on the island of Røst where people lived quite well off the sea and the milk and meat provided by animal husbandry. In the early summer they took their annual sales production of stockfish and other fish items to Bergen, some 1,000 km away, and exchanged it for grain, textiles

¹⁸ Sandnes, 'Mannedauden', pp. 164–6; O. J. Benedictow, *Fra rike til provins* (K. Mykland (ed.), *Norges historie*, 5, Oslo, 1977), pp. 116–17.

and other commodities.¹⁹ The profitable north Norwegian connection with Bergen, brought about by the fish trade, is indicated by expensive altarpieces and other ecclesiastical art items imported from Germany and the Netherlands to decorate churches in the north.

The late Middle Ages also saw the emergence of fishing and fish trade as important elements of the Icelandic economy. Ordinary farmers, cottars and landless people all benefited from the growing demand for fishery products. Most of the income from the fishing industry was, however, channelled to the large private and ecclesiastical landowners who acquired the productive fishery sites along the coast. By keeping inland prices low when fish were delivered as tenants' payments and selling for export at a price 70 per cent higher the owners of great landed complexes profited greatly. Icelandic fish were exported for a long time via Bergen, which from the thirteenth century had acquired a monopoly of foreign trade both with north Norway and Iceland. The town retained its grip on the north Norwegian trade but its Icelandic trade declined from the beginning of the fifteenth century as English vessels started to fetch dried fish directly from Iceland. From the 1470s they had to compete with Hanseatic traders from the North Sea ports. Increasing competition led to rising prices and the boom of the Icelandic fish trade saw the rise of affluent families with their residential farms in the coastal areas while the landed properties of the old leading families were in the best farming regions further inland.²⁰

The large-scale herring fisheries in Danish waters, based on south-western Skåne, continued in the late Middle Ages and were of great economic importance to all parties involved, among them local freeholders and tenants and the Danish women who prepared and salted down the herring. Further north, export of dried herring from Norwegian Bohuslän also continued and from around 1500 the herring fisheries in Limfjorden and the bight of Hø in western Jylland grew in importance.

In the Swedish and Finnish regions around the Gulf of Bothnia conditions for agriculture were marginal. In the late Middle Ages hunting of fur-bearing animals and trade in hides began to lose importance whereas fishing and the fish trade were increasingly promoting affluence. Salted salmon was the most

19 The accounts of the Italians (their leader Pietro Qverini and two of his shipmates) have been translated into Norwegian with an introduction referring to manuscripts, earlier editions and translations by A. Helland, *Topografisk-statistisk beskrivelse over Nordlands amt*, 2 (*Norges land og folk topografisk-statistisk beskrevet*, 18, Kristiania, 1908), pp. 865–908. The accounts were first printed by Gio Battista Ramusio, *Navigazione e viaggio* (Venezia, 1559; later editions 1574, 1583, 1606).

20 Þórsteinsson, *Island*, p. 124.

valuable item of the fish trade. Farmers in large numbers, and local traders as well, annually brought their catches to Stockholm which for many of them entailed sea voyages of up to 700 km. There were structural similarities between the fishing and fish trade of the Gulf of Bothnia and corresponding activities on the coast of western and northern Norway.²¹

In large areas of Sweden the expanding mining industry was of major importance for the late medieval rural economy. The mining of ores, mostly iron, and iron smelting in furnaces had already begun in Sweden towards the close of the twelfth century with the help of German technological expertise and capital. Iron exports grew from slightly less than 300 metric tons around 1370 to some 900 tons at the turn of the fifteenth century and peaked with 1,100 tons in the early 1490s. Iron was mainly produced in the inland area of Bergslagen in the centre of Sweden, north and west of the central rural regions. The area was approximately 150 km wide and extended from the environs of Lake Siljan in Dalarna in the north some 200 km south to the districts bordering on lakes Vänern, Vättern, Hjälmaren and Mälaren. At Falun in Dalarna copper was also mined for export.

Medieval mining in Sweden was organised and also to a large extent controlled by members of the freeholder class or the lower nobility, including Germans. Iron ore mining was mostly opencast. The mines were in the possession of part-owners, so-called ironmen (Swedish *bergsmän*), who worked in teams, whereas refining took place in privately owned smelting works connected with the farms of the individual ironmen. Mining and related metallurgy required large numbers of hired labourers, including a notable female element as on the Continent. The royal power helped to make labour available by granting mining districts the right to provide asylum for criminals.

It has been estimated that around 20,000 persons may have been engaged in late medieval mining and related metallurgy in Sweden, i.e. about 3 per cent of the total population. The mining industry formed the basis for a wealthy upper stratum of freeholder farmers. The mine-owners enjoyed special privileges and some of them were able to move up into the lower nobility. Mining also affected the agrarian economy of adjacent and sometimes distant regions. The mining districts' need for foodstuffs created a significant domestic market for rural products, as noted particularly by Janken Myrdal. Grain was delivered from the Mälär basin while the demand for meat products led to long-range oxen drives resembling those of central Europe. They covered distances of 300–400

21 N. Friberg, *Stockholm i bottniska farvatten: Stockholms bottniska handelsfält under senmedeltiden och Gustaf Vasa* (Monografier utgivna av Stockholms kommun, 53, Uppsala, 1983), pp. 48–58, 317–26.

km to Bergslagen from the southern provinces where animal husbandry was important. In this trade iron was commonly used as a means of payment; in places crown taxes were also paid in iron, even in areas that did not produce it.²²

In Norway export of lumber to the British Isles had started already in the thirteenth century, and towards the end of the Middle Ages the lumber industry and related trade became an important part of the farming economy in the southern coastal regions. The rise of the industry was connected with the introduction, from the late fourteenth century, of the water-powered gate saw which made it possible to increase, at a low cost, the output of milled boards, the most sought after timber product. The investment needed to establish simple sawmills in the rapids of numerous rivers was not so large as to prevent ordinary farmers from building them and thus taking part in a profitable export industry. Even tenants could utilise the forest resources of their farms relatively free of interference by the landowners. Although it was against regulations farmers were able, until the mid-sixteenth century, to provide lumber directly to foreign buyers from the Netherlands and the British Isles.²³

The commercial activities of farmers depended on profitable methods of production but the decisive factors were the market opportunities and low transport costs. This was the case not only with fishing and the fish trade in northern Norway and with mining and related metallurgy in Sweden but also with the exportation of beef cattle from Denmark, in which people with their roots in the farming milieu participated as buyers, drovers and distributors.

In the coastal regions and particularly in the archipelagos, peasant seafaring flourished in the late Middle Ages, often combined with trade as in Denmark. These activities could develop into regular shipping, as they did in southern Scandinavia and further north in Åland and parts of the south-west Finnish archipelago. Because of Åland's favourable location in relation to Stockholm the local population provided the growing town with fish and animal products, mortar lime, and prefabricated houses or 'Åland cottages' that were dismantled and shipped to Stockholm and then reassembled. Within a limited area of the south-west Finnish coastal region people specialised in the manufacture of various types of wooden vessels which they transported for sale to Stockholm and to north German towns south of the Baltic. Prefabricated boats were also made by the farming population of Hordaland in western Norway and

22 J. Myrdal and J. Söderberg, *Kontinuitetens dynamik: Agrar ekonomi i 1500-talets Sverige* (Stockholm Studies in Economic History, 15, Stockholm, 1991), pp. 146–9, 440–87.

23 Dyrvik et al., *Norsk økonomisk historie*, pp. 41–4; Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, pp. 224–6.

exported to Shetland, Orkney, and Scotland from the early sixteenth century.²⁴ Similar and earlier examples of rural commercial activities can be found in other parts of Scandinavia, for example the whetstone and steatite (soapstone) industries that flourished in Norway as early as the Viking Age.

From the latter half of the fourteenth century authorities in the Nordic kingdoms strove to monopolise trade and seafaring for the burghers of the towns. This was particularly evident in the peripheral northern areas; trade with these regions fell into the hands of certain towns and favoured groups. This was the situation in Iceland and northern Norway, with Bergen as the focal town. In the Swedish kingdom, Stockholm and Åbo (Turku) had a similar function in relation to the areas around the Gulf of Bothnia. In practice, however, the commercial activities of the agrarian communities developed relatively undisturbed in most of Scandinavia in the late Middle Ages, particularly in the fifteenth century. Commercial contacts between the countryside and the towns were in many respects on an equal footing, which meant that farmers engaging in trade could easily establish themselves in the towns. In several places, particularly in Denmark, the last century of the Middle Ages also witnessed the emergence of a distinct group of trading farmers who belonged to the upper stratum of agrarian society. It was not until the sixteenth century that the Crown in the Nordic kingdoms was strong enough to enforce the burghers' monopoly of trade and seafaring, though it was not always carried out successfully.²⁵

In Nordic rural society at the end of the Middle Ages there were, in many places, quite a few people who were no longer typical farmers, most often individuals who had acquired wealth through trade. In Denmark, tenant farmers could amass considerable property in movables, as indicated by tax records from 1518–19. It was not uncommon to have assets worth 1.5 kg of silver, and there were cases where individuals had their movables assessed to the value of 4.4–5.9 kg of silver, equivalent in value to 100–133 cows. Wealth was generated by the farmers' own production, particularly by raising steers for export, but the largest fortunes were apparently made by operating as intermediaries in agricultural trade, particularly of cattle.²⁶

Norwegian tax lists from about 1520 point to marked regional differences within agrarian society. The most affluent regions were along the coast of

24 Gissel, 'Opsummering', p. 375; Friberg, *Stockholm*, pp. 66–75; G. Dahlbäck, *I medeltidens Stockholm (Monografier utgivna av Stockholms stad*, 81, Borås, 1988), p. 109; K. Helle, *Orknøyene i norsk historie – The Orkneys in Norwegian history* (Bergen, 1999), pp. 26–7.

25 B. Poulsen, 'Land og by i senmiddelalderen', in Ingesmann and Jensen (eds.), *Danmark i senmiddelalderen*, pp. 204–20.

26 Ulsig, 'Bonde og godsejer', pp. 115–21.

northern Norway where fishing and related trade was important. In the fishing communities of the northernmost regions, Troms and Finnmark, the average property in real estate and movables equalled the value of approximately 1–1.2 kg of silver, the price of 25–30 cows. Local fish traders constituted the upper stratum in these communities, with personal property of up to 7–13 kg of silver, the value of 166–333 cows. These people were not, however, farmers but entrepreneurs closely associated with the lower nobility and burghers of Bergen. At the same time there was a very poor element in the northern fishing districts. The Norwegian tax records also show that the lumber trade created affluence in several southern Norwegian districts.²⁷

Information is lacking on the late medieval distribution of wealth in rural Sweden but material from the second half of the sixteenth century shows that mining and the supply of foodstuffs for the mining districts created surplus wealth among freeholders which was invested in silver objects. There was also in Finland a limited stratum of trading farmers who acquired considerable fortunes, albeit markedly smaller than those of their Danish counterparts.²⁸

Changing trends towards the end of the Middle Ages

Not all groups in rural society shared in the growth of the economy. In Denmark farmers in the regions where cereal cultivation predominated had few opportunities to exploit the growing demand for export steers. Nor could ordinary farmers producing solely for their own households with no opportunity to expand their tillages do much to improve their living conditions. In general, there is evidence of positive economic effects for the rural population in the case of Danish and Norwegian tenants. Erik Ulsig in particular has stressed the beneficial economic developments for Danish tenant farmers, in sharp contrast to the situation in the north German territories where the profitability of the holdings of both the nobles and the freeholders dramatically declined after the mid-fourteenth century.²⁹ In Norway readier access to fodder resources and arable land, together with lowered land-rents and taxes, eased the economic pressure on both tenants and freeholders.

27 Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, pp. 102–5.

28 Myrdal and Söderberg, *Kontinuitetens dynamik*, pp. 92–8; Orrman, *Bebyggelseutvecklingen*, pp. 173–80.

29 Ulsig, 'Bonde og godsejer', pp. 110–22; W. Abel, *Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft vom frühen Mittelalter bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (*Deutsche Agrargeschichte*, 2, Stuttgart, 1962), pp. 131–5.

The picture is less clear in Sweden and Finland, particularly for freeholders. The close of the fourteenth century and the first decades of the following century saw growing dissatisfaction over crown-levied land-rents and taxes. Taxation increased in order to compensate for the reduced revenue basis caused by deserted farms and holdings and because of the financial needs created by the union monarchy's war against the counts of Holstein. The establishment of collective crown taxes, for which a certain number of farms were jointly responsible, increased the pressure on the remaining tax and rent payers. In many localities lack of grain forced people to bake bread from flour mixed with bark, a practice still common in Finland as late as the nineteenth century. Travelling home through Sweden in the 1430s the above-mentioned Italian seafarers who had been shipwrecked in Lofoten, noted how common people ate bark-mixed bread.³⁰

Nevertheless, changes in the late medieval agrarian economy caused by shortages of people and labour generally benefited tenants and freeholders. When the demographic trend finally changed and the shortage of tenants and wage-labourers decreased, economic conditions began to change to the disadvantage of most of the rural population and to the advantage of the groups who had suffered during the preceding crisis. This reversal was already evident in some areas in the second half of the fifteenth century but it was generally a long-term process that did not reach its peak until the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries. It was also a process which varied greatly in different parts of Scandinavia. In Denmark it appears that the deepest trough in the late medieval contraction of settlement was reached at the turn of the fifteenth century. In Norway it took another half-century and the first signs of new demographic and related settlement growth do not appear much before the first decades of the sixteenth century. As shown above, Finland and the northernmost parts of Sweden and Norway were hardly touched by the otherwise general loss of population and contraction of settlement.

When the shortage of tenants and hired labour eased, there were similar reactions among large landowners in most of Scandinavia; they attempted to re-establish the pre-crisis level of yields from landed property. Land-rents remained at the low late medieval level far into the sixteenth century or rose only slightly in some places, but major landowners were to some degree able to compensate for the loss of income by introducing additional payments or

30 L.-O. Larsson, *Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson och 1430-talets svenska uppror* (Värnamo, 1984), p. 104.

dues. In Denmark these included a payment on entering a tenant relationship, hospitality dues (Danish *gæsteri*) and commutation of labour services into dues (*ervidspenge*). Such payments tended to increase as time passed and at the beginning of the sixteenth century amounted to approximately half of all payments from tenants to landowners.³¹ Landowners also strove to have tenants raise steers for them. There were similar tendencies in Sweden where the tenant farmers' burden of dues and payments began to mount during the second half of the fifteenth century in the form of hospitality dues, maintenance of the landowner's livestock for a certain period or payment in lieu of this, and the introduction of mandatory labour service. Corresponding new payments were not levied in Norway until the sixteenth century.³²

A characteristic feature of Danish agrarian society during the recovery of population and settlement was growing competition over forests and meadows. Landowners sought to restrict their tenants' right to exploit the forest resources connected with the tenant farms. Raising of pigs on acorns in the oak woods was made subject to payment and the tenants' hunting rights were abolished. There was also competition among the nobles over acquiring woodland. In the fifteenth century they began to move their estates out of the villages to forest and meadow areas within the village boundaries. The tillages of such estates were then separated from the open field system of the village farmers and constituted a separate and enclosed demesne.³³

The economic conditions of the Icelandic population were in some respects different from those in the other parts of Scandinavia. There was a certain decrease in land rent which benefited most of the ordinary farmers who were tenants. Nevertheless, their living conditions deteriorated through the introduction of mandatory labour service in the fourteenth century, a burden which increased in the following century.

By the close of the Middle Ages Nordic agrarian society had generally entered a phase of economic development that tended to be disadvantageous to the broad mass of farmers. However, this trend was still in its initial stages, which meant that, with certain exceptions, conditions were clearly more favourable than they had been before the Black Death. At the same time the incipient incorporation of Scandinavia into the European market economy

³¹ Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser*, p. 334; Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 390–1.

³² Ferm, *De högadliga godsens*, pp. 167–8; Ø. Rian, *Den nye begynnelsen 1520–1660* (K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norgeshistorie*, 5, Oslo, 1995), p. 78; Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, pp. 222–4.

³³ Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 362–4; E. Porsmose, *De fynske landsbyers historie i dyrkningsfælleskabets tid* (Odense University Studies in History and Social Sciences, 109, Odense, 1987), pp. 89–96.

made it possible, in many places, for members of the peasantry to amass wealth by commercial activity.

Legal and social conditions

In the course of the high Middle Ages the rural population of Scandinavia came to comprise only legally free persons – tenants, cottagers and servants as well as freeholders. Tenancy was based on a mutually binding agreement between landowner and farmer, and the independent position of the latter is shown by the fact that it was customary for Danish and Swedish tenants to own not only the livestock and farming implements but often also the buildings of the rented farm; this was partly the case in Norway too. The Danish cottagers (*inquilini*) were more dependent on the landowners but they were nevertheless entitled to revoke their relationship with their landlords. The free position of the rural population is also attested by the fact that both freeholders and tenants could appear independently in *thing* assemblies and oppose the representatives of the Crown.

In the Swedish and Norwegian kingdoms, the latter including Iceland, there were no major changes in the legal standing of the rural population in the late Middle Ages. In Denmark, however, developments took a different course with the result that the legal and social situation of the rural population at the beginning of the early Modern Period was in several respects different from the rest of Scandinavia.

Already in the high Middle Ages there were factors at work in Denmark which tended to weaken the legal and social position of the rural population. The long periods of political unrest and disintegration in the second half of the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth centuries made it increasingly difficult for the peasantry to defend themselves against infringements of their rights and property. Consequently, there was a growing need for protection and support from more powerful persons or institutions which the landowner, be it a nobleman or an ecclesiastical institution, could best provide. This protective relationship was in 1304 laid down in legislation based on the principle that the landowner or his representative was to present a tenant's case before a court of law.

Throughout the late Middle Ages the large Danish landowners' authority over their servants and tenants increased. They acquired the right to fines imposed on their tenants by public courts of law, involving more and more severe crimes. Around the mid-fifteenth century they started to take over public

judicial functions that originally belonged to the Crown. From the end of the 1450s landlords of the upper nobility were thus entitled to establish their own courts of law with jurisdiction over tenants and other subjects in exceptional cases. Finally, in 1523, the noble landowners' so-called 'right to hand and neck' was officially ratified, i.e. their right to prosecute their subjects before public courts of law and to carry out the sentences passed on them, including the death penalty. In all this the great noble and ecclesiastical landowners strove to exclude the State from their relationship with their tenants and other subjects.

The legal position of freeholders also deteriorated in late medieval Denmark, in their case in relation to the Crown. In 1360 freeholders were declared to be under the protection of the Crown, which also increasingly sought to regulate their working of the land in order to ensure their ability to pay taxes. In 1446 in Lolland, freeholders were even denied the right to have more than one dog each. In 1507 the division of freehold farms among heirs was officially prohibited.

Originally, the personal freedom of Danish tenants meant that they could revoke their contracts with the landowners and move elsewhere, thereby escaping the restrictions of the protective relationship. In practice, the desertion of numerous farms in the decades following the Black Death provided opportunities for personal mobility but it also led the great landowners to attempt to restrict the right to move, and they did so successfully from the end of the fourteenth century. In 1376 the Crown confirmed the right of the peasantry to move from one location to another but in 1396 it was laid down that a tenant wishing to move had to pay the landowner a sum corresponding to six months' land-rent.

Other limitations on free mobility were introduced in the mid-1440s when it was prescribed that men without their own households could be forced, in certain parts of the country, to become tenants or to settle on a crown-owned farm. In Sjælland and on a few small islands nearby this trend developed to the extent that it was no longer possible, after the mid-1490s, for tenants and their sons to move from a farm without the landowner's consent. From about the same time there is information on the sale and donation of peasants in Sjælland. This was a situation that, according to Troels Dahlerup, emerged as the result of an agreement between the noble and ecclesiastical owners of the large complexes of landed property which predominated throughout Sjælland. The position of the Sjælland peasantry thus began to resemble serfdom without quite reaching that point before the close of the Middle Ages. In other parts of Denmark peasants were still entitled to move freely but in certain situations

freeholders were faced with demands for a payment to the Crown if they wanted to leave their farms.

The deterioration in the legal position of Danish tenants coincided with a similar trend in the German territories east of the Elbe and in other parts of eastern central Europe, as pointed out by Erik Ulsig. However, in contrast to the situation further south and east we have seen that the prevailing economic trends were favourable for Danish tenants. The restructuring of agrarian production units resulted in the formation of farms and holdings with a relatively moderate burden of dues and payments in proportion to yield.³⁴

As large-scale agrarian production for the most part ceased in Denmark in the late Middle Ages it was no longer necessary for tenants to provide labour services on the landowners' estate. The large owners were normally absentees who restricted their administrative interests to the collection of the yield. The lower nobility who had earlier resided in the villages largely vanished as a result of the reduced land rents. Consequently, Danish village and hamlet communities came to enjoy a high degree of autonomy in their internal affairs, despite the peasants' dependent position in relation to the landowners. The farmers' relations with each other and their way of utilising common resources were taken care of by themselves without noticeable interference from the outside. Order was maintained and transgressions were dealt with within the bounds of village self-government, similar to forms of 'peasant communalism' in various parts of central Europe.³⁵

Efforts to strengthen the hold of the nobility, Church and Crown over the peasants were also made in the other Scandinavian kingdoms. From the reign of the German Albrecht of Mecklenburg in the 1360s continental conceptions of the unfree position of the peasantry temporarily gained a foothold in the local administration of Sweden undertaken by German nobles. The rural population was arbitrarily subjected to taxes and dues without legal basis. A similar situation occurred in both Sweden and Norway under the rule of the union monarchy in the first decades of the fifteenth century. Swedish statutes in 1414 and 1437 restricted tenants from moving from their farms but the latter statute has also been interpreted as being primarily intended to prevent a reduction of Crown revenues. Corresponding regulations were laid down in Iceland in 1404, 1437 and 1531. Like their Danish colleagues the Swedish aristocracy aimed at becoming 'kings over their tenants', as expressed

34 Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser*, pp. 331–44; Ulsig, 'Bonde og godsejer', pp. 115–21.

35 A. Bøgh, 'Feudalisering og bondekommunalisme: Noget om samfundet i senmiddelalderen', in Ingesman and Jensen (eds.), *Danmark i senmiddelalderen*, pp. 96–104.

in negotiations concerning the restitution of the union monarchy in 1483. In this, however, they were only marginally successful.

The stability of the late medieval Scandinavian tenancy system is shown by the duration of the leases. Towards the end of the Middle Ages they lasted on average 10–12 years or as long as 23–25 years in Denmark, depending on the property complex to which they belonged, and it was not uncommon for sons to take over from their fathers.³⁶ The formal duration of high medieval leases varied greatly in Norway and this was apparently still the case in the late Middle Ages. Lifetime contracts were quite common and occasionally even hereditary rights to lease land were granted, particularly on holdings belonging to large ecclesiastical landowners. On the other hand, time-based leases were apparently also widespread, most often for three years, but would normally be renewed. Norwegian tenants who fulfilled their obligations to their landlords could expect to occupy rented holdings for life and it was not uncommon for sons to take over their fathers' leases. In Sweden a contractual period of six to eight years was laid down by law but there, too, leases were often for considerably longer periods.³⁷

There were many factors in the Scandinavian structure of society which contributed to maintaining the free standing and societal position of the rural population; family or kin was one of them, helping to resist the pressure exerted by the nobility, Church and Crown. As shown above (Chapter 10) legislation in every Nordic kingdom recognised the right of kinsmen to first refusal on the sale of inherited land and to redeem it if this right had not been respected. This was intended to protect the right of kin to inherited property and at the same time raised an obstacle to the acquisition of freehold farms by large landowners. Kin rights to land appear to have been weakest in Denmark where freehold in the high Middle Ages was already restricted to approximately one-quarter of the farms and where the Crown began to exercise direct control over freeholders from an early stage. The role of family and kin in maintaining the position of freeholders, and indirectly that of the peasantry in general, has been particularly stressed in Sweden, with reference both to economic and social support and to land rights.³⁸

Regional and local self-management was important in the Nordic countries, being largely responsible for the functioning of society, and here the

³⁶ Porsmose, 'Middelalder', pp. 353–5.

³⁷ K. Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt 1130–1350* (in K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norgeshistorie*, 3, Oslo, 1995), pp. 113–14; Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, p. 107; T. Lindkvist, *Landborna i Norden under äldre medeltid* (*Studia Historica Upsaliensia*, 110, Uppsala, 1979), pp. 87–93.

³⁸ Larsson, *Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson*, pp. 60–1.

thing assemblies, in which all freemen took part, played a central role. Before the introduction of laws applying to the whole kingdom legislation took place in provincial *things*. In addition to their functions as judicial assemblies local and regional *things* were organs for reaching agreements, distributing responsibilities and organising economic ventures.

With the emergence of the national kingdoms the *thing* assemblies, particularly at the provincial level, developed into meetings where royal representatives communicated with the regional and local communities and the latter, at least formally, were asked to accept taxes and dues to the Crown. However, one result of the growing dependence of the Danish peasantry on the large noble and ecclesiastical landowners was that *things* for the local administrative districts of *herreder* (sing. *herred*) ceased to be a channel of communication between Crown and peasantry. By contrast, the *things* in the Swedish and Norwegian kingdoms maintained their character of assemblies expressing the opinions of the broader rural population throughout the late Middle Ages; they could not be completely ignored and served to restrict the aspirations of the Crown and nobility. It should, however, be noted that despite the participation of both freeholders and tenants in the *things* they were dominated by a farming élite.

In Sweden and Finland late medieval *things* continued to function within the legal framework of the local districts of hundreds or *härader* (cf. Danish *herred*). The district judge (Swedish *häradsbövding*) exercised state jurisdiction but was tied to the local community: he was appointed by the king from among three candidates nominated by the *thing* of the *härad* and was required to reside there. As a rule, these posts were held by local noblemen. Towards the end of the Middle Ages the ties between judge and local community were, however, loosened by changes in the appointment procedure.

The importance of the local Swedish *thing* assemblies has been stressed by Eva Österberg. The *thing* maintained the social order of the local community with little interference from outside. In the administration of justice attempts were made to integrate transgressors in the community. There was also interaction between the agrarian community and the local representatives of the Crown in the sense that the latter had to take into account local economic realities and circumstances when levying taxes and other dues.³⁹

39 S. Clason, *Häradsbövdingens ämbetet i senmedeltiden och Gustaf Vasas Sverige* (Rättshistoriskt bibliotek, 39, Stockholm, 1987), pp. 32–6, 62–98, 230–3; E. Österberg, 'Kontroll och kriminalitet i Sverige från medeltid till nutid: Tendenser och tolkningar', *Scandia*, 57 (1991), pp. 65–6; E. Österberg, 'Bönder och centralmakt i det tidigmoderna Sverige: Konflikt – kompromiss – politisk kultur', *Scandia*, 55 (1989), pp. 87–8.

In the continuous political and often armed power struggle that was waged in the Swedish kingdom in the last medieval century, the free rural population was a political factor that had to be taken into account by the aristocracy; it was possible for it to exert pressure to have its demands, primarily lowered taxes, considered. Accordingly, in Sweden there was political agitation intended to influence the opinion of the rural population as early as the end of the fourteenth century, and from the 1430s this agitation – which appears to have been completely lacking in Denmark – was very intensive. In the latter half of the fifteenth century both local and provincial *things* were used as centres of agitation and action in the struggle for political power. The political significance of the rural commoners is witnessed by a report on the situation in Sweden sent to the grand duke of Lithuania by a southern European observer in 1496, stating that ruling the country would be impossible for anyone who was not recognised by the people (*vulgus*).⁴⁰

In Norway a time-honoured view holds that the late medieval *thing* organisation acquired in many respects a different role from the one it had played in the high Middle Ages. As royal authority was seriously impaired and unable to function in certain respects its links with the local communities were weakened and the social order was largely maintained by the local *things* which reverted to much of their pre-state stage of evolution. They functioned within the framework of rural society with weakened contacts with the royal administrative apparatus.⁴¹

Steinar Imsen in particular has argued against this view. According to him, the Norwegian *thing* organisation did not degenerate in any way; the changes that occurred were the result of adaptation to the altered reality of political life in Norway in the period of recession from the second half of the fourteenth to the first half of the sixteenth centuries. In a dynamic rural society local *things*, dominated by the local élites, functioned as a channel of communication between state authorities and local communities and the written procedures that had been developed in the high Middle Ages were maintained. The spontaneous adaptation of local communities to a changed political and social situation runs parallel with the economic adaptation that occurred.⁴²

40 M. Biskup, 'Sveriges plats i Jagellonernas politik kring sekelskiftet 1500', *Scandia*, 45 (1979), p. 229

41 A. Holmsen, *Norges historie: Fra de eldste tider til 1660* (4th edn, Oslo, 1977), pp. 338–40, 350; S. Imsen, 'Over bekken etter vann eller historien om den tyske bondekommunalismen som hjelp til selvhjelp', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 68 (Oslo, 1989), pp. 170, 182; S. Imsen, *Norsk bondekommunalisme fra Magnus Lagabøte til Kristian Kvart*, 1 (Trondheim, 1990), pp. 10–11.

42 Imsen, 'Over bekken', pp. 181–3; Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, pp. 110–13.

Peasant unrest and revolts

In Scandinavia as in other parts of Europe there was dissatisfaction and unrest among the rural population in the high and late Middle Ages, on several occasions escalating into revolts. Such risings were not isolated phenomena; they were often connected with conflicts in which the leading strata of society were involved on both sides.

None of the high medieval Swedish armed conflicts can be unequivocally described as peasant rebellions but in Denmark and Norway the situation was different. In Denmark such rebellions broke out at uneven intervals from the mid-twelfth until the first half of the fourteenth centuries, in 1154 in Skåne, in 1181–2 in Skåne and Halland, in 1255–8 in Sjælland and other places, in 1313 in central Jylland, and in 1328 in Sjælland. In 1343 Estonia, belonging to the Danish kingdom, saw a broad-based peasant rebellion, almost a rising of the whole population. In Norway local peasant revolts occurred in 1183 in Vestlandet, in 1213 in Trøndelag, and more extensively in Østlandet in 1200, followed by new revolts in 1217 and 1227. However, not all the Nordic peasantry's clashes of interests with the Crown or Church escalated into armed revolts. Thus, the introduction of church tithes in the Finnish inland regions in the first half of the fourteenth century led to a number of conflicts which in one case resulted in an interdict of several peasants by the pope but not any armed action.⁴³

High medieval peasant risings were, as a rule, prompted by new taxes levied by the Crown or Church. In Norway they were reactions against the pressure exerted on the rural population by the Crown and aristocracy in the last phase of the Civil Wars. In Denmark there is even evidence of armed actions against the nobility. A recurrent feature was that the peasants regarded the new demands as unjustified and also as transgressions of established customs, as for instance when the Crown and Church strove to limit the peasants' use of common land and to raise taxes. Demands were often put forward and risings organised within the framework of the local and regional *thing* organisation,

43 J. Würtz Sørensen, 'Budstikken går: Bøndernes oprørspraksis i nordisk middelalder', in A. Bøgh et al. (eds.), *Til kamp for friheden: Sociale oprør i nordisk middelalder* (Ålborg, 1988), pp. 34–6, 41–5; B. Wählin, 'Oprøret mod Knud den Hellige i 1086: Brydninger under stats- og klasseskiftet i Danmark', *ibid.*, pp. 46–8, 70–1; J. E. Olesen, 'Oprør og politisering i Sverige 1463–71', *ibid.*, pp. 185–7; H. Koht, *Norsk bondehistorie* (Oslo, 1926), pp. 16–17; Helle, *Under kirke og kongemakt*, pp. 63, 67, 73–4; E. Österberg, 'Agrarekonomisk utveckling: de nordiska länderna ca 1300–1600', *Scandia*, 45 (1979), p. 174; P. Reinholdsson, *Upprør eller resning? Samhällsorganisation och konflikt i senmedeltidens Sverige* (Studia historica Upsaliensia, 186, Uppsala, 1998), pp. 257–62).

the result being that whole local communities joined the revolts.⁴⁴ The Estonian revolt was different since it was a popular rising against an oppressive invading power but the underlying societal contradictions were more complex than that. According to Niels Skyum-Nielsen, the Estonian peasantry was aware of Danish plans to sell the occupied regions to the Teutonic Order and revolted in order to avoid the oppression of German landlords. They also sought military support from the representatives of the Swedish king in Finland.⁴⁵

The high medieval risings occurred at a stage when the population was growing and a lack of arable land was increasingly making itself felt, coinciding with higher tax demands by the Crown and Church and attempts to raise land-rents. After the mid-fourteenth century, when the economic situation of the broader rural population changed radically for the better, the regular peasant revolts ceased until the second quarter of the fifteenth century. This, however, did not mean that the underlying causes for conflict had been eliminated.

In Sweden the late 1360s and the first half of the 1370s saw dissatisfaction among the rural population caused by the German-influenced regime of King Albrecht of Mecklenburg and there was widespread readiness to take up arms together with the king's opponents. In Finland, too, there is evidence of peasant resistance against the Mecklenburgian regime and against Swedish nobles as well, resulting for example in the killing of a royal bailiff in 1367.⁴⁶

A new period of peasant revolts started in the 1430s when such risings took place all over Scandinavia. In Denmark there was popular unrest in 1434, mainly in Skåne and Halland, and between 1438 and 1441 the kingdom experienced a series of major peasant revolts, also in the Danish islands and in many parts of Jylland. In Sweden peasant revolts started in Dalarna in 1434 under the leadership of Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson; they developed into a struggle against the union monarchy in which certain groups of nobles joined forces with the peasantry but the opposition between aristocracy and peasantry remained. It should, however, be noted that the character of Swedish fifteenth-century peasant revolts has recently been questioned. Until 1437 the Swedish risings were centred on Dalarna and the regions around the large lakes of Vänern, Vättern, Hjälmaren and Mälaren, but risings also occurred

44 Würtz Sørensen, 'Budstikken går', pp. 37–40.

45 N. Skyum-Nielsen, *Fruer og vildmænd*, 1, *Dansk middelalderhistorie: 1250–1340* (København, 1994), pp. 207–11.

46 J. Jaakola, *Suomen sydänkeskiäka* (*Suomen historia*, 4, Porvoo, 1944), pp. 323, 343.

in the southern parts of the kingdom and even spread to the Danish provinces in present-day southern Sweden. In Finland the peasants of Satakunta, Tavastia and Karelia revolted in 1438. In Norway there were tense situations as early as the 1420s, and in 1436–8 peasant uprisings took place in the Oslo region and in Telemark. A corresponding revolt occurred in Iceland already in 1433.⁴⁷

After the 1430s Nordic peasant uprisings were more sporadic but nevertheless occurred until the end of the Middle Ages. They broke out in 1463 in Swedish Uppland, around the year 1500 in parts of Norway including the Oslo region and Bohuslän, and from the 1520s both in Denmark and Norway.⁴⁸

The fifteenth-century peasant uprisings were often planned well in advance and their prospects of success assessed, as pointed out by Jørgen Würtz Sørensen; from their regional starting point they tended to spread over large areas. Decisions to take part were made in *thing* assemblies and actions in different regions could be coordinated. Summons to assemble with arms to the *thing* and to organise military resistance were spread by help of the local government's messenger system. These revolts were often led by members of the local élite, which made them more effective. This was particularly the case in Norway where the farming population received an influx of aristocratic families who had suffered economically from the late medieval agrarian crisis. Also in Finland members of a freeholding élite appear as the leaders of the revolts of the 1430s.⁴⁹

With the exception of Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson's rising the peasant revolts were – after initial successes – defeated by the Crown and nobility. Nevertheless, the operations of the peasant forces reveal considerable organisational skills. In Denmark in 1441 the peasants made use of a defensive enclosure of wagons similar to that successfully employed by the Hussites. In many cases military command was in the hands of noblemen but there were also peasant leaders such as Halvard Gråtøpp of Norway and one David of Finland, both affluent freeholders. Looting of the manors of the nobility has been regarded as evidence of the desperate and improvised nature of the risings but recent studies stress the rational aspect of these actions. They contributed to supplying the peasant forces, and by destroying deeds and documents recording the rights to landed property and labour services the peasants sought – as did their

47 Österberg, 'Agrarekonomisk utveckling', p. 174.

48 Ibid.; Olesen, 'Oprør og politisering', pp. 185–9; Bjørkvik, *Folketap*, 195–9, 218–20.

49 Würtz Sørensen, 'Budstikken går', pp. 31–40.

later counterparts during the French Revolution – to eliminate the legal basis of their obligations.⁵⁰

There is no generally accepted explanation of the widespread unrest among the Nordic peasantry in the 1430s. The interpretation of the revolts as resulting from a continuing deterioration of the peasants' situation is unacceptable. With the exception of Denmark, revolts occurred in rural societies where the peasants were – from a European perspective – independent in relation to the large landowners. With the possible exception of Swedish and Finnish freeholders the economic situation of the rural population was favourable in comparison with that of the high Middle Ages. That the tenants and freeholders were not without economic resources is indicated by the high fines they were able to pay after the revolts. The risings occurred in a period when an economic and social trend that favoured the rural population was starting to change, particularly in Denmark where the agrarian crisis ended first and the large landowners began to seek a restoration of their former economic positions. With the exception of Norway this was also a time of increasing taxation pressure from the Crown. Dues were levied in conflict with established customs and ruthlessly collected by foreign bailiffs without roots in the regions under their administration. There were also conflicts and competition between the union monarchy and various aristocratic factions, which cannot have escaped the attention of the peasantry.⁵¹

Special factors played a part in limited local risings, as in certain regions of Finland in 1438. Until the turn of the fifteenth century these areas had, as a rule, been completely without a local nobility but in the following decades a number of noblemen appeared as landowners invested with judicial authority, by which they attempted to gain possession of mill sites, shares in rapids, and outlying lots that were either in common ownership or in the possession of individual freeholders.⁵²

In most cases the medieval Scandinavian peasant revolts ended in complete military defeat of the insurgents accompanied by high fines and the execution of leaders. This, however, did not prevent new uprisings. In Ditmarschen, at the base of Jylland, the local peasant community repeatedly succeeded in repelling the attacks of the ducal authorities and this may have made Danish peasants more willing to engage in revolts. The political establishment could not completely ignore the widespread dissatisfaction among the

50 Ibid., pp. 37–42.

51 Ibid., pp. 32–3; Österberg, 'Agrarekonomisk utveckling', pp. 174–96.

52 S. Suvanto, 'Keskiaika', in E. Laaksonen and E. Pärssinen (eds.), *Suomen historia*, 4 (Espoo, 1985), pp. 145–7.

rural population and in the long view the risings probably restricted the attempts of the Crown and privileged landowners to raise their demands on the peasantry. In Sweden and Finland peasant actions resulted in lowered taxes, and attempts to weaken the status of tenants and freeholders were – it appears – unsuccessful until the end of the Middle Ages. In Norway, too, unrest among the rural population tended to restrict extraordinary royal taxation.

The towns

GÖRAN DAHLBÄCK

In the mid-fourteenth century, when the Black Death reached Scandinavia, there were about a hundred towns in the region. They varied greatly in size and importance, and were unevenly distributed. Denmark was the most densely urbanised with some sixty towns scattered all over the realm; almost all of them were (or had once been) accessible by sea. Norway only had about a dozen towns, all but one (Hamar) situated on the coast. In Sweden, including the Finnish part of the kingdom, there were almost thirty towns, most of them – and the most vigorous – along the Baltic coast and in the Lake Mälaren region. There were no towns in Iceland and the northern parts of Norway and Sweden. The only possible exception was the important trading place of Vågan in the Lofoten Islands whose urban status is a matter of debate (see Chapter II).

In the early fourteenth century there was, therefore, a relatively dense pattern of towns in the southern part of Scandinavia, which were concentrated in the coastal areas and linked by the traditional sailing-routes. This pattern was to determine the urban system of Scandinavia for the rest of the Middle Ages (and long afterwards). The few new towns established between 1350 and 1520 were complementary and generally unimportant.¹

1 A general overview of Scandinavian medieval urbanisation can be found in the contributions to G. A. Blom (ed.), *Middelaldersteder (Urbaniseringsprocessen i Norden*, 1, Oslo, 1977), published for the Seventeenth Nordic Historical Congress in 1977; little, however, is said about late medieval developments in the Danish contribution. Danish medieval towns are listed in A. Andrén, *Den urbana scenen: Städer och samhälle i det medeltida Danmark* (Bonn and Malmö, 1985). For the former Danish towns in present-day Sweden, see also G. A. Blom and J. Moen, *Städer och stadsbor* (Lund, 1990). The medieval towns in present-day Sweden and Finland are treated individually in the series *Medeltidsstaden*, published from 1976, in Sweden by Riksantikvarieämbetet och Statens historiska museer, in Finland by Museiverket/Museovirasto, and containing reports from the research project *Den tidiga urbaniseringens konsekvenser för nutida planering (Medeltidsstaden)*. A summing up of the project is given in H. Andersson, *Sjuttiosex medeltidsstäder – aspekter på stadsarkeologi och medeltida urbaniseringsprocess i Sverige och Finland (Medeltidsstaden*, 73, Stockholm,

No new Danish towns were founded or granted privileges in the second half of the fourteenth century but in the fifteenth century Denmark saw almost thirty new foundations, many more than in the other kingdoms. However, with one exception, Landskrona in Skåne, they were of little importance. Urban development in Sweden resembled that of Denmark; about a dozen new towns were founded, mostly in the fifteenth century, and none of them were important. In Norway the only town established in the late Middle Ages was the small township of Uddevalla (Oddevall) in Bohuslän (in present-day Sweden), which received its privileges in 1498. In Iceland and the northern part of the Scandinavian peninsula towns were still lacking, again with the possible exception of Vågan.

The difference between the high medieval urban expansion and the modest late medieval development can hardly be explained by referring only to the loss of population and the economic disruptions caused by the Black Death and the following outbreaks of plague. The density of towns achieved before 1350, particularly in Denmark and the central parts of Sweden, would probably in any case have reduced the need to establish new ones; the urban system may already have come a long way towards being complete within the framework of medieval society. Nevertheless, the fact that new foundations were lacking completely in Denmark and largely also in Sweden in the second half of the fourteenth century clearly indicates that urban development was influenced by the general recession of that period. That there was only one late medieval foundation in Norway points in the same direction. However, the effects of the late medieval demographic crisis on the towns of Scandinavia remain little understood.

The sources

What really happened to Scandinavian towns in the second half of the fourteenth century is obscured by the shortage of contemporaneous evidence, particularly sources on which quantitative valuations may be based. So far, Scandinavian urban archaeology has dealt mainly with the origins of early towns and their high medieval development. Among archaeologists there appears to be a growing interest in the late medieval fate of towns but little has yet been published on the subject, with the notable exception of Trondheim.²

1990). For the Finnish towns, see also P. Tommila (ed.), *Stadsväsendets historia i Finland* (Helsingfors, 1987).

2 A. E. Christophersen and S. W. Nordeide, *Kaupangen ved Nidelva (Riksantikvarens skrifter, 7, Trondheim 1994)*. For Denmark see, for example, P. K. Madsen, 'Byarkæologiens

As for written evidence, there is a general decrease in Scandinavian narrative sources; historical sagas were no longer produced and ecclesiastical annal writing was waning. Late medieval chronicles are mainly political (as for example the Swedish *Erikskrönikan* and *Karlskrönikan*) and have little information on urban development. The German genre of town chronicles was never introduced in Scandinavia although Nordic urban culture was in most other respects strongly influenced from Germany. Conversely, there is an increase of documentary material corresponding to types found in other European countries. Such material is, however, still sparse, and derives mostly from the last century of the Middle Ages. It can be divided into the following main categories:³

1. Normative sources, *law codes* and *privileges*, issued by the king or, exceptionally, by some other territorial lord.
2. *Political documents* issued in the towns (but rarely concerned with urban affairs) and bearing witness to the importance of towns as scenes of political activity.
3. *Minutes of the governing bodies* of the towns: The Swedish urban law-code from about 1350 mentions a 'book of the town' when prescribing that new burghers should be listed in *stadzins book*. The oldest extant book of this type comes from Kalmar, starting in 1401, but with quotations from an older book of the 1380s. A corresponding book from Stockholm was destroyed in a town fire of 1419, whereupon the town council started registering estate deeds in a new one, declaring that it would replace the lost 'town book'. More detailed minutes, normally called *libri memoriales* (Swedish *tänkeböcker*), containing court proceedings and other decisions of the town council, still exist for Kalmar for the fifteenth century, for Stockholm from 1474, for Arboga from 1451, and for Jönköping from 1456. They are known to have existed for other Swedish towns as well.⁴ In Denmark some town councils began to keep minutes of their proceedings around 1500; the oldest extant are from Malmö, beginning in 1503, but it was not until 1551 that the Crown

genstandsfund: Kilder til handels- og innovationshistorie, socialtopografiske ledetyper eller blot dagliglivets tilfældige affald?', in P. Ingesman and J. V. Jensen, *Danmark i senmiddelalderen* (Aarhus, 1992), pp. 259–81. For Sweden, see G. Dahlbäck, 'Stadtkernforschung in Schweden', in H. Jäger (ed.), *Stadtkernforschung* (Köln and Wien, 1987), pp. 371–85.

³ Surveys of the late medieval sources for the towns of Bergen and Stockholm can be found in K. Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad: Fra opphavet til 1536* (Bergen bys historie, 1, Bergen, 1982), pp. 681–97, and G. Dahlbäck, *I medeltidens Stockholm* (Stockholm, 1988), pp. 61–3, 189–91.

⁴ J. Liedgren, 'Stadsbok', *KLNM*, 16 (1971), cols. 652–4; L. Svensson, 'Tänkebok', *KLNM*, 17 (1972), cols. 195–9; Dahlbäck, *I medeltidens Stockholm*, pp. 61–2.

requested that court rolls be kept in the Danish towns. In Norway such registers are not known to have existed at all before the end of the Middle Ages.⁵

4. Very few *tax registers* and *financial accounts* have survived from medieval Scandinavian towns. The only important series is from Stockholm where tax lists (*skotteböcker*) still exist for the years 1460–68, 1501–10 and 1516–25. There are also fragments of tax registers and smaller accounts from Malmö (1517–20), Schleswig, Bergen (1518–21) and Trondheim (1520).⁶ The lack of urban tax and land registers can to a certain extent be compensated for by retrospective analysis of royal cadastres and deeds from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁷
5. Likewise, *customs accounts* are very scarce even if levies of customs duties are quite well known. More complete Scandinavian accounts are preserved only from the last decades of the Middle Ages, concerning the shipping through the Sound (from 1497) and the trade between southern Jylland and northern Germany (Gottorp in the 1480s, Ribe c. 1500–10). Hanseatic trade with Scandinavia can be documented with the help of accounts of the so-called *Pfundzoll*, a duty levied for military reasons in Lübeck and other Hanseatic ports in the second half of the fourteenth century and in the 1490s, whereas the trade between Scandinavia, particularly Norway, and England is reflected by the late medieval customs accounts of Boston, Lynn and London.⁸
6. Finally, there is the large and heterogeneous material of *deeds and other documents* concerning economic transactions and other internal affairs in the towns. Such documents are indispensable for our understanding of late medieval urban life but rarely lend themselves to quantitative estimates. The foreign material that contributes to our knowledge of the late medieval

5 E. Kroman, 'Stadsbok, Danmark', *KLNM*, 16 (1971), col. 654.

6 L. Svensson and G. A. Blom, 'Skottebok', *KLNM*, 15 (1970), cols. 670–2.

7 See, for example, for Bergen in Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 702–7; G. A. Ersland, 'Kven eigde byen? – ei gransking av opphavet og utviklinga av grunnleige i Bergen og eit utval nordeuropeiske byer' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Historisk Institutt, University of Bergen, 1994).

8 P. Enemark et al., 'Told', *KLNM*, 18 (1974), cols. 431–48; Enemark, *Studier i toldregnskabsmateriale i begyndelsen af 16. århundrede*, 1 (Århus, 1971), pp. 25–58; F. Bruns, 'Die Lübeckischen Pfundzollbücher von 1492–1496', *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, 11 (1904–5), pp. 110–31, 13 (1907), pp. 457–99, 14 (1908), pp. 357–407; G. Lechner, *Die hansischen Pfundzollisten des Jahres 1368 (Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte, Neue Folge, 10, Lübeck, 1935)*; C. Weibull, 'Lübecks Schifffahrt und Handel nach den nordischen Reichen 1368 und 1398–1400', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Lübeckische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 47 (1967), pp. 5–98; A. Nedkvitne, 'Utenrikshandelen fra det vestafjelske Norge 1100–1600' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bergen, 1984).

history of Scandinavian towns includes the *Urkunden* of the Hanseatic ports and similar documents from other foreign towns trading with Scandinavia, minutes of Hanseatic diets (*Hanserezesse*), and English chancery enrolments.

Population sizes

The evidence referred to above only permits conjectural estimates of urban populations around 1500 and from before 1350 there is very little with which to compare such estimates. The Black Death and the following outbreaks of plague must have reduced the number of town dwellers radically but attempts to measure and even date the lowest level of population amount to little more than educated guesswork.

Whatever the quality of population estimates, there is no doubt that Scandinavian towns were small by contemporary European standards. None of them exceeded 10,000 inhabitants and the most populous Scandinavian town around 1500 may have been the commercial centre of Bergen in Norway with perhaps as many as about 7,000 inhabitants. Stockholm and København, the largest towns of Sweden and Denmark, may each have had some 5,000–6,000 permanent residents, followed by Danish Malmö with about 4,500. That these were only middle-sized European towns is evident from a comparison with, for instance, the north German towns of Lübeck and Hamburg; their populations may have approximated 25,000 and 20,000 respectively.⁹ A modest number of other Scandinavian towns probably counted their inhabitants in the low thousands, such as Oslo, Trondheim and Tönsberg in Norway, Viborg, Ribe, Roskilde and Lund in Denmark, Kalmar, Åbo, Linköping and Uppsala in Sweden. However, the overwhelming majority of Scandinavian towns could hardly boast of more than a few hundred residents around 1500. Visby on Gotland, once one of the largest Nordic towns, lost much of its importance because of late medieval changes to trade routes and its population had been greatly reduced by the end of the Middle Ages.

To argue retrospectively from the already very conjectural numerical situation around 1500 is difficult and perhaps not advisable, but it can at least be assumed that the relative order of population sizes around 1500 was more or less the same before the mid-fourteenth century (with the exception of Visby). Stockholm, already in the fourth decade of its existence (1289), was

9 Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 487–93; Dahlbäck, *I medeltidens Stockholm*, p. 50; S. Lilja, 'Stockholms befolkningsutveckling före 1800: problem, metoder och förklaringar', *Historisk tidskrift*, 115 (Stockholm, 1995), pp. 307–9; E. Kjersgaard, *Indtil år 1600: Byen og borgen Havn* (Københavns historie, 1, København, 1980), pp. 103, 108, 152; 'Malmö', *Nationalencyklopedien*, 12 (Höganäs, 1994), p. 21.

called the most populous town of the Swedish realm. In Norway Bergen had obviously reached the same position by the end of the twelfth century, and kept it throughout the rest of the Middle Ages. In a royal decree of 1384 it was expressly called the largest town of Norway.¹⁰

A crucial question regarding the general urban situation in the late Middle Ages is whether the towns followed the general decline in population in the latter half of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth centuries. The plague outbreaks must initially have hit the towns at least as hard as the rural districts. Excavation of a churchyard in Trondheim suggests that the rate of burials fell by no less than 70 per cent in the late Middle Ages and the number of urban parish churches was reduced,¹¹ which may indicate a very serious and persistent decrease of population. In Oslo the density of settlement on an excavated site was permanently reduced after a fire in 1352.¹² On the other hand, important European towns are known to have recovered rapidly after the late medieval outbreaks of plague, mainly through immigration from the countryside. There are indications that this was also the case in Bergen. Here, the immigration of Germans attached to the Hanseatic *Kontor* and constituting the late medieval artisans' guilds of the town may have supplemented the influx of people from the Norwegian countryside.¹³ In Stockholm the tax registers from the 1460s and the first decade of the sixteenth century seem to indicate a somewhat different situation: a large but stagnant population towards the end of the Middle Ages.¹⁴

The examples mentioned should serve as a warning against any assumption that Scandinavian urban populations developed uniformly in the late Middle Ages. The general recession may have hit some towns severely and led to stagnation in others. Others again may have recovered rapidly and even increased their populations from what they were before the Black Death. The general demographic and economic situation in the various regions of Scandinavia was obviously one determining factor. Another was probably the degree to which trade constituted an economic basis for urban life.

In Norway it has been maintained that as far as the towns were collection centres for the revenues of Crown, Church and private landowners they must inevitably have been hit by the late medieval fall in land-rents, taxes and other official sources of income. This must have had an especially strong impact

10 Dahlbäck, *I medeltidens Stockholm*, p. 24; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, p. 487.

11 Christophersen and Nordeide, *Kaupangen ved Nidelva*, pp. 103, 289.

12 E. Schia, 'Topografi og bebyggelsesutvikling', in E. Schia (ed.), *De arkeologiske utgravninger i Gamlebyen, Oslo*, 3 (Oslo, 1987), pp. 187–8.

13 Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 487–93.

14 Lilja, 'Stockholms befolkningsutveckling', p. 309, 334.

where the Church dominated urban life, as in Trondheim, Stavanger and Hamar. Reduced incomes from the rural areas and a general reduction in the volume of production and trade caused by the loss of population may also have kept the population of other towns, such as Oslo, at a lower level than before 1350.¹⁵ The volume of dried fish exported via Bergen fell markedly in the second half of the fourteenth century but this was compensated for by rising prices, helping the town to recover from its population losses.¹⁶

Historians from the other Scandinavian countries have generally been more cautious than some of their Norwegian colleagues in assessing the effects of the population loss and the agrarian crisis on urban development. They have mostly gone no further than to suggest that the decline in the revenues of Crown, Church and nobles may also have had consequences for urban society but that these are difficult to measure because of lack of quantitative source material.¹⁷

Altogether, there is reason to believe that the fate of the Scandinavian towns was closely linked to the increasing importance of commerce in the late medieval economy of northern Europe. In the long run regional centres for the international marketing of goods – such as Bergen, København, Malmö, Stockholm and Kalmar – appear to have prospered whereas smaller towns whose trade was mainly local were more permanently affected by the population loss and the ensuing agrarian crisis. However, the growing importance of commerce may also have favoured smaller towns which had the right products to offer. This was particularly the case with Danish towns which supplied the large cities of northern Germany with food or functioned as links in the growing trade through the Sound. In Norway the increase in the export of lumber may have helped to stabilise and improve the economy of towns such as Skien and Tønsberg. It also accounts for the urban status given to Oddevall (Uddevalla) in Bohuslän in 1498 and the concentration of settlement in other ports west of Oslofjord, some of which were later to develop into towns. In Oslo the growing volume of direct trade between the farmers of the hinterland and merchants in the town, eliminating

15 K. Helle and A. Nedkvitne, 'Norge: Sentrumsdannelser og byutvikling i norsk middelalder', in Blom (ed.), *Middelaldersteder*, pp. 273–8; A. Nedkvitne and P. G. Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg: Fra byens oppkomst til 1536* (Oslo bys historie, 1, Oslo, 1991), pp. 356–7, 380; K. Helle, 'Down to 1536', in R. Danielsen et al., *Norway: A History from the Vikings to Our Own Times* (Oslo, 1995), pp. 94–5; G. A. Blom, *Hellig-Ølavs by: Middelalderen til 1537* (Trondheims historie 997–1997, 1, Oslo, 1997), pp. 267, 290, 325.

16 Nedkvitne, *Utenrikshandelen*, pp. 163–7, 341; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 686–7, 690–3; Helle, 'Down to 1536', pp. 94–6.

17 See for instance K. Hørby, *Velstands krise og tusind baghold* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, 5, København, 1989), pp. 310–11, 315.

private landowners as an intermediate link, may have worked in the same direction.¹⁸

The goods of international urban trade

The main Scandinavian products in demand in late medieval western Europe were raw materials, especially those which had undergone a small degree of refining or manufacturing: dried and salted fish of different kinds, iron and copper, furs and hides, butter and meat, and ever increasing volumes of timber (cf. Chapter 19). In return Scandinavia wanted salt and spices, cloth, wine and beer, and a large variety of highly manufactured goods for the upper classes. In Iceland and western and northern Norway foreign grain products were in particular demand.

The dominant Norwegian export was still dried fish ('stockfish') produced along the entire coast of western and northern Norway from cod and other gadoid species; the main area of production was the Lofoten and Vesterålen Islands in the north, and the fish was exported via Bergen, through which most of Norway's foreign trade was channelled. According to a current estimate some 3,000 metric tons or more were sent to foreign ports in the first half of the fourteenth century, at least half of the more accurately recorded amount of 6,000 tons that was exported in the mid-seventeenth century. The mid-fourteenth-century population losses led to a sharp decline in stockfish production, but growing demand and increasing prices soon caused it to rise again, though it had probably not reached the pre-plague level by the end of the Middle Ages.¹⁹ A calculation based on English customs accounts from 1301 to 1311 indicates that stockfish accounted for 82 per cent of the total value of imports from Norway; other items were fish oil 8 per cent, herring 3 per cent, timber 3 per cent, hides 3 per cent, others 1 per cent. That stockfish kept its dominant position in the late Middle Ages is witnessed by the Lübeck customs (*Pfundzoll*) accounts of 1370, according to which it may have constituted more than 90 per cent of the imports from Bergen.²⁰ The export of lumber grew throughout the late Middle Ages and it became a staple commodity in

18 Helle, 'Down to 1536', pp. 94–6; B. Poulsen, 'Land og by i senmiddelalderen', in Ingesmann and Jensen (eds.), *Danmark i senmiddelalderen*, pp. 196–220; P. Enemark, 'Danmarks handel i senmiddelalderen: En niche i europæisk økonomisk udvikling?', *ibid.*, pp. 241–58; Nedkvitne and Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg*, p. 380.

19 Nedkvitne, *Utenrikshandelen*, pp. 60, 163–7; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 308, 686–7, 690.

20 A. Nedkvitne, 'Handelssjøfarten mellom Norge og England i høymiddelalderen', *Sjøfartshistorisk årbok*, 1976 (Bergen, 1977), pp. 73–4, 87; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, p. 311.

Norwegian foreign trade in the first part of the sixteenth century, when the waterdriven saw was developed.²¹

Even in Danish foreign trade a fish product, salted herring from the fisheries off south-western Skåne (Skanör-Falsterbo), was the chief export. In about 1400 some 70,000 barrels were annually brought to Lübeck and perhaps as much to other Hanseatic towns. The importance of this trade is shown by the fact that the herring exported to Lübeck in 1399 is calculated to have been worth more than four times as much as the whole Lübeck trade with Sweden. In the fifteenth century, however, the herring shoals changed their pattern of migration and the Skanör-Falsterbo area lost most of its importance to other towns along the Sound and to fishing sites in northern Jylland and Bohuslän.²²

The Danish export of grain (barley, oats, rye, and wheat) seems to have been important throughout the late Middle Ages but its volume is difficult to estimate as the existing customs accounts are few and the trade was to a large extent outside the control of the town merchants. Nobles and ecclesiastical institutions had the right to trade their own products and so the farmers of the islands of southern Denmark often sailed to German ports on their own, in spite of the Crown's efforts to force them to sell their grain in the nearest market town.²³

Other agricultural products, such as butter, dried and salted meat, and hides, were also significant in late medieval Danish trade. Live cattle, mainly oxen, had always been exported but the trade assumed new proportions in the decades around 1500. The animals were raised in Jylland, bought at the local markets by German and Danish merchants, driven southwards in big herds, and sold in the north German towns. In the first decades of the sixteenth century c. 25,000 animals annually passed the customs booth at Gottorp in Holstein.²⁴

Swedish international trade was mostly conducted through Stockholm but some of it also passed through Åbo (Turku) in Finland, Kalmar, and other towns along the south-eastern Baltic coast, and through Lödöse, the only

21 Helle and Nedkvitne, 'Norge', pp. 276–7; Helle, 'Down to 1536', pp. 95–6; Nedkvitne and Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg*, pp. 369–72. It was previously thought that butter was an important item in the late medieval Norwegian trade (see G. A. Blom, 'Smörhandel, Norge', *KLNM*, 16, 1971, cols. 332–3) but evidence for this is lacking.

22 V. Niitemaa, 'Fiskhandel', *KLNM*, 4 (1959), col. 356; T. Dahlerup, *De fire stænder* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, 6, København, 1989), p. 169; L. Ersgård, 'Vår marknad i Skåne': *Bebyggelse, handel och urbanisering i Skanör och Falsterbo under medeltiden* (Stockholm, 1990).

23 P. Enemark, 'Kornhandel, Alm. og Danmark', *KLNM*, 9 (1964), cols. 147–54; Enemark, 'Danmarks handel i senmiddelalderen'.

24 P. Enemark, 'Øksnehandel', *KLNM*, 20 (1976), cols. 674–83.

Swedish port in the west. The main Swedish exports were refined iron and copper, which came largely from the mining districts of central Sweden. According to the customs accounts of Lübeck for 1492–5, copper made up c. 60 per cent and iron c. 30 per cent of the value of Stockholm's exports. The percentages are probably too high because of the political situation in those years; more normal averages should probably be sought somewhere between these figures and the percentages known for Stockholm's exports half a century later (1558): iron 30, copper 23, butter 10, animal products (among them hides) 12, furs 5, fish (mainly salted salmon) 8, and seal oil 11 per cent.²⁵

In the late Middle Ages Iceland had only one product of importance to offer the international market – dried fish – in exchange for which the Icelanders could import the grain they needed so badly. Before the upswing in the Icelandic fisheries after about 1340, homespun (*vaðmál*) had been Iceland's chief export to Norway but apparently homespun exports ended in the second half of the fourteenth century.²⁶

Merchants, guests and immigrants

The late medieval export trade of Scandinavia was to a very large extent in the hands of foreigners, mainly Germans, but in some places and for certain periods also Englishmen, Netherlanders and Scotsmen.

From the beginning of the thirteenth century until the end of the Middle Ages the Germans, especially merchants from Lübeck, were dominant in the Baltic, the Sound, and the Belts. In the western part of Scandinavia the Germans faced competition from English merchants. The English appear to have participated actively in the rise of Bergen as an international trading centre in the twelfth century and had a strong position there until about 1440; after that they are only rarely mentioned in the sources. The reason for this has been thought to be the Germans' commercial superiority: better organisation, better ships, and better opportunities for importing the grain that Norway needed. But the decline of the trade between England and Bergen had probably more to do with the fact that after 1400 the English started to buy

25 The figures for the 1490s are calculated on the basis of the money-value of goods assessed in the *Pfundzollbücher*; the figures for 1558 are taken from N. Friberg, *Stockholm i bottniska farvatten: Stockholms bottniska handelsfält under senmedeltiden och Gustav Vasa* (Stockholm, 1983), p. 317.

26 H. Þorláksson, 'Island. Urbaniseringstendenser på Ísland í middelalderen', in Blom (ed.), *Middelaldersteder*, pp. 179–81; H. Þorláksson, 'Vaðmál og verðlag: Vaðmál í utanlands-viðskiptum og búskap Íslendinga á 13. og 14. öld' (doctoral thesis, Háskoli Íslands, 1991), p. 512.

their fish directly from Iceland, eventually causing a drastic decline in Bergen's trade with the ports of eastern England. From the 1470s German merchants from the North Sea ports followed in the wake of the English to Iceland but the dominance of the English was still so strong that the fifteenth century has been termed the 'English Age' (*enska öldin*) of Icelandic history.²⁷

In other parts of Scandinavia English traders were not often seen as guests. In 1412 King Erik of Pomerania gave them permission to take up residence in the newly founded Landskrona in an attempt to persuade English ships sailing to Prussian and Livonian towns to call in Denmark. However, English trade with Denmark remained modest throughout most of the fifteenth century because of the conflict which arose between Danish–Norwegian and English interests in the Iceland trade. There are no signs of continuous commerce between the two countries until after 1490, when a treaty was concluded between the Danish and the English kings, and it was still relatively insignificant in the following decades. English traders were even less important in Sweden. Apart from continuous contacts with Lödöse, the only Swedish port in the west, they had no active interests at all in Sweden before the end of the Middle Ages.²⁸

It was at this time too that the dominant Germans were encountering stronger competition from the Dutch and, in Norway, also from the Scots than from the English merchants who were fading into relative insignificance. Of a total number of 363 foreign ships paying the traditional duty on entering the harbour of Bergen in 1518–21, 282 (78 per cent) came from Hanseatic towns (of which 59 per cent were from Lübeck and other Wendish towns, 19 per cent from Hamburg, Bremen and the Zuidersee towns of Kampen and Deventer), nineteen from Holland (5 per cent), nineteen from Scotland (5 per cent), three from England (1 per cent) and forty-one (11 per cent) from other areas.²⁹

The Dutch towns, especially Amsterdam, became eager competitors of the Hanseatic towns in the Scandinavian trade from the second half of the fifteenth century. They were often encouraged by Scandinavian rulers who wanted to put pressure on the Hanseatic towns, mainly Lübeck. Dutch trade with Scandinavia, offering cheap Bay-salt, cloth and an assortment of small-wares, increased in volume in the late Middle Ages, stimulated not least by the Danish–Norwegian king's promise of equal rights for Dutch and German merchants in 1490. However, it was not until after the Reformation that Dutch trade assumed greater proportions, with the possible exception of exports of

27 B. Þorsteinsson, *Enska öldin i sögu Íslendinga* (Reykjavík, 1970).

28 T. Rafto et al., 'Englandshandel', *KLNM*, 3 (1958), cols 658–76; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 774, 788–92.

29 Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, p. 775.

Norwegian timber. A few Dutchmen also settled in Scandinavian towns before 1520.³⁰

Scottish merchants were not present at all in Sweden in the Middle Ages and in Denmark they did little more than found a small colony in Helsingør in the late fifteenth century.³¹ It was only in Norway that they were of some importance, which can partly be explained by the traditional connections between Norway and Orkney-Shetland whence came some of the 'Scots' who settled as merchants and artisans in Bergen. The nineteen Scottish ships visiting Bergen in 1518–21 bear testimony to a not insignificant traffic.³²

The relations between foreign merchants – particularly Germans – and the Scandinavian kingdoms, towns and local tradesmen were regulated by different types of privileges and treaties of which the oldest are of the thirteenth century: a treaty between Earl Birger Magnusson on the part of the Swedish crown and the town of Lübeck in 1251 or 1252, one between the Norwegian King Håkon Håkonsson and the town of Lübeck in 1250, and a series of privileges issued by Håkon's successors for the German merchants in Norway between 1278 and 1296. At the Skåne Fairs at Skanör-Falsterbo German merchants obtained privileges in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.³³ All these privileges allowed the Germans to trade more or less freely, at least in bulk, and with very low duties in certain towns or market places. Throughout the rest of the Middle Ages there was a more or less continuous conflict between the German towns, which sought to enlarge their privileges, and the Scandinavian kings, who wanted to restrict their activities.

The German interest in Scandinavian trade was strong enough to have a lasting influence on the shape of Scandinavian towns, their lifestyle and culture. The German presence was evident in most of the larger towns but it found different expressions in the different countries. One basic and constant question was whether the Germans should be accepted only as 'guests', which meant that their stay was restricted to the summer trading-season (roughly from May to September/October), or whether they should be allowed to stay also for the winter, which meant that there was a risk that they would engage in local trade and thus threaten the interests of native merchants.

30 H. Yrwing and P. Enemark, 'Hollandshandel', *KLNM*, 6 (1961), cols. 637–48; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 800–4.

31 A. E. Christensen, 'Danmarks befolkning i middelalderen', in A. Schück (ed.), *Befolkning under medeltiden (Nordisk kultur, 2)*, Stockholm, Oslo and København, 1938), p. 53.

32 Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 804–5.

33 G. A. Blom et al., 'Handelsprivilegier', *KLNM*, 6 (1961), cols. 147–58; N. Ahnlund, *Stockholms historia före Gustav Vasa* (Stockholm, 1953), pp. 115–18; K. Kumlien, *Sverige och hanseatern: Studier i svensk politik och utrikeshandel* (Stockholm, 1953), pp. 87–106, especially pp. 92–7; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 379–84.

The official Danish policy was always that foreign merchants should primarily be guests and in the fifteenth century the Crown repeatedly – but with little success – tried to prohibit their staying for the winter. If they were allowed to stay they should at least pay taxes and accept other duties imposed on the burghers of the towns. This restrictive policy may have kept the number of permanently resident Germans at a modest level in Danish towns.³⁴

In Norway in the 1250s the Crown accepted ‘winter-sitters’ on the same conditions as native merchants but soon – and especially in Bergen – lost its strength to control them.³⁵ In the turmoil following the Black Death the Hanseatic traders in Bergen established themselves as a separate body organised on the pattern of the Hanseatic trading stations in Brugge, London and Novgorod. The *Kontor* (‘office’) of Bergen, as it was later called, was never integrated in the life of the town. The Hanseatic merchants organised themselves extraterritorially on Bryggen (‘the wharf’) east of the harbour bay, practising internal jurisdiction according to their own rules and choosing their own aldermen – all with the acquiescence of the Hanseatic diets. Inter-marriage between Germans and Norwegians was prohibited; the former were expected to return home when they planned to marry, mainly to Lübeck, which dominated the *Kontor*. All means, including violence, were used to prevent members of the *Kontor* from settling in Bergen; consequently this rarely happened. Smaller Hanseatic trading stations were also established in the east Norwegian towns of Oslo and Tønsberg, organised as a common unit (factory) with Rostock as its mother town. Here relations between Germans and Norwegians were more relaxed and it was not uncommon for members of the east Norwegian factory to settle as burghers in these towns.³⁶

Many of the Germans who visited Sweden were guests or occasional winter-stayers but the majority chose to settle permanently as burghers of the Swedish towns. This was in keeping with one of the main clauses of the treaty between Earl Birger and Lübeck in 1251–2:

Lübeckers coming to Sweden with their goods shall be free from all fees and duties, but those who wish to stay longer and live in the country shall follow the laws of the country and obey them and in all other respects be called Swedes.

34 K. Hørby, ‘Tyskar, Danmark’, *KLNM*, 19 (1975), cols. 137–8; P. Enemark, ‘Vinterliggare, Danmark’, *KLNM*, 20 (1976), cols. 145–8.

35 Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 370–90, 475–87.

36 Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 730–87; Nedkvitne and Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg*, pp. 362–6; K. Helle, ‘The Hanseatic merchants in Bergen in the Middle Ages’, in I. Øye (ed.), *Bergen and the German Hansa* (Bergen, 1994), pp. 20–8.

This must be interpreted as meaning that the Swedish crown not only wanted those who stayed for a longer period to pay taxes and fulfil other communal obligations as winter-stayers had to do elsewhere in Scandinavia, they should also become Swedish citizens. This meant that they had to obey Swedish law and could not be exempted from it. As full citizens the German immigrants could take part in urban administration on a par with indigenous Swedes, and were probably expected to do so.

That this was a tempting alternative is shown by the fact that all the important trading towns (Stockholm, Kalmar, Söderköping, Åbo) – and some of the smaller ones too (for example Västerås, Arboga, Uppsala) – which were in their earliest urban phase in the second half of the thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth centuries could count a substantial group of Germans among their more important burghers. Calculations are risky but it has nevertheless been argued that the Germans may have constituted up to one-third of the burghers of towns such as Stockholm, Kalmar and Västerås.³⁷ Their share of the total population was presumably less than that as the German element was less frequent or almost non-existent in the lower social strata. German immigration seems to have been more important in the earlier phase of Swedish urbanisation. As time passed many Germans were naturalised and in the smaller towns they disappear from view in the fifteenth century. However, in Kalmar and Stockholm they continued to play an important commercial and political role until the end of the Middle Ages, which required a continuous influx of immigrants.

Town laws

Most of the laws that regulated medieval urban life in Scandinavia were issued in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (cf. Chapter 11). There were noteworthy differences between the town law systems of the three kingdoms.

Once the towns had been given a judicial administration separate from that of the countryside the idea seems to have been that each town should have its own code of law. In Denmark this was a principle adhered to until the end of the Middle Ages, though it was of course impossible for every town

³⁷ For Stockholm, see Ahnlund, *Stockholms historia*, p. 300, quoting E. Weinauge, *Die deutsche Bevölkerung im mittelalterlichen Schweden* (Leipzig, 1942); for Kalmar, see N. Blomkvist, 'Kalmars uppkomst och äldsta tid', in I. Hammarström (ed.), *Kalmar stads historia*, 1 (Kalmar, 1979), pp. 248–52, and D. Selling, 'Senmedeltidens Kalmar', *ibid.*, 2 (1982), pp. 45–8; for Västerås, see K. Kumlien, *Västerås till 1600-talets början (Västerås genom tiderna*, 2, Västerås 1971), pp. 128–9.

to have a unique code of law. The easiest procedure was to adopt and adapt an already existing law book from a bigger and more advanced town in the neighbourhood and have it sanctioned by the Crown. In this fashion regional groups of laws developed.

Most towns in Jylland had laws that went back to the town law of Schleswig from the first half of the thirteenth century, but some copied the law of Tönder which in 1243 had been given the law of Lübeck. In Skåne and the other eastern provinces the towns used an old type of law called *birkeret*, originally – it appears – adopted for Lund. In Sjælland most towns first used the law of Roskilde but later many of them, together with bigger towns elsewhere such as Malmö in Skåne, adopted the more advanced law of København. This was originally issued by the town lord, the bishop of Roskilde, and consequently strongly influenced by Canon Law. In 1419 København became a royal town and this eventually led to a thorough revision of the urban code, issued in its new version by King Christopher in 1443. This was the most extensive and up-to-date medieval Danish town law, and gradually came to be regarded as in effect a common Danish town law (in different editions and under different names such as ‘Queen Margrethe’s’, ‘King Christopher’s’, and ‘King Hans’s’) though it was never officially promulgated as such. At the end of the Middle Ages King Christian II tried to give Denmark a national law system by editing a code of law for the rural districts and another for the towns (1521–2) but they were both abolished after his dethronement in 1523.³⁸

In Norway King Magnus Law-mender issued a new urban code for Bergen in 1276 that was meant to be used in other towns as well; it was soon adopted in almost identical editions in Trondheim, Oslo and Tønsberg and in the fifteenth century was also applied to other and smaller towns.³⁹ Since the ‘Townlaw’ aimed primarily at regulating urban life in Bergen it did not satisfactorily fulfil local needs elsewhere; special royal privileges were therefore issued for other towns, supplementing and modifying the Townlaw.⁴⁰

Sweden was the only Scandinavian kingdom to receive a medieval urban code that was definitely meant to apply in all towns. No royal promulgation of the code is known and there has consequently been much speculation about when and how it was made. The general opinion today is that the law was worked out by a commission in the same way as King Magnus Eriksson’s rural Landlaw. The conditions in Stockholm, the biggest town, provided the

38 E. Kroman, ‘Stadsrett, Danmark’, *KLNM*, 16 (1971), cols. 692–5.

39 G. A. Blom, ‘Stadsrett, Norge’, *KLNM*, 16 (1971), cols. 691–2; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 175–9; T. Knudsen, ‘Oslo bylov’, *KLNM*, 13 (1968), col. 42.

40 Helle and Nedkvitne, ‘Norge’, pp. 264–77.

guidelines and work on the code was mainly carried out in the mid-1350s and ended before 1360; it was then given by King Magnus or his successors to each town separately.⁴¹ The Swedish Townlaw was the most contemporary urban law in Scandinavia and provided the towns of the Swedish kingdom with a common judicial system. It was printed in 1618 and not formally abolished until 1734–6.

Almost twenty years earlier – at the beginning of the 1340s – King Magnus had confirmed a special urban code for Visby, the only town in the kingdom that was a member of the Hanseatic League; both in his reign and after the Danish conquest of Gotland Visby enjoyed a degree of independence. Its law was strongly influenced by German law but there were also elements reflecting Scandinavian tradition. It has consequently been described as ‘an evidently independent legal system’.⁴²

In all three kingdoms urban law in the late Middle Ages was supplemented or – more rarely – changed by privileges issued for individual towns or, especially in Denmark, groups of towns. The Crown also issued different kinds of ordinances for the towns, particularly in Norway.

Scandinavian urban laws, like those of the rest of Europe, regulated town administration, the urban judicial system, the ways in which trade should be conducted, and the behaviour of the town-dwellers.

Town administration

The foundations of late medieval town administration were laid in the thirteenth century and followed a north European, especially German, pattern (cf. Chapter 11). By 1350 town councils had come to function in all Scandinavian towns and continued to do so throughout the rest of the Middle Ages and long afterwards. The fully developed council of the fifteenth century was both governing body and court of justice. In Denmark and Sweden it was self-elective while in Norway royal officials controlled the appointment of new councillors. The number of councillors varied according to the size of the town; twelve was apparently a common number but in the bigger towns (for example, Stockholm) there could be as many as twenty-four or even thirty. Normally a councillor only served at intervals, for example every second or

41 Å. Holmbäck and E. Wessen (eds.), *Magnus Erikssons stadslag: I nusvensk tolkning*, (Stockholm, 1966), pp. lv–lxxxvii.

42 G. Hasselberg, ‘Visby stadslag’, *KLNM*, 20 (1976), cols. 164–8; Yrwing, *Visby – Hansestad på Gotland* (Stockholm, 1986), pp. 137–40.

third year, which meant that the active council had some six, eight or ten members.⁴³

In Denmark and Sweden two burgomasters presided over council meetings. It was common for more burgomasters (four or six) to be elected but only two of them acted together at one time in rotation. In Norway the office of burgomaster is not mentioned until 1439 (Oslo) and 1444 (Tønsberg) and in Bergen and Trondheim it was not introduced before the end of the Middle Ages; instead a royal official, most often the lawman, presided over the council.⁴⁴ In Denmark and Sweden the town bailiff or some other royal official normally attended the council meetings, thus securing the influence of the Crown.

Those elected to the town council in the larger Danish and Swedish towns were normally, as in German towns, members of the merchant class. This was always the case in Stockholm after 1419, from which year the names of all late medieval councillors are listed. In Denmark in 1422 it was ordained that in Sjælland no craftsman was eligible to serve on a town council.⁴⁵ In Norway house-owners and craftsmen were often among the late medieval councillors but in Bergen such persons were usually engaged in trade as well.⁴⁶ Craftsmen were apparently also elected councillors in smaller Swedish towns where the number of eligible merchants was not sufficient.⁴⁷

In one important respect the Swedish rules for electing a town council differed from those of the other Scandinavian kingdoms: Magnus Eriksson's Townlaw prescribed that half of the councillors should be Germans and the other half Swedes. Presumably this was a principle that had been followed previously; it can be regarded as a natural consequence of Earl Birger's claim, in his treaty with Lübeck, that German immigrants should become Swedish citizens, whether the intention was to prevent the Swedes from being overrun by Germans or to secure for the Germans the influence promised by the treaty – both interpretations have been put forward. In practice, the degree

43 S. Ljung et al., 'Stadsstyrelse', *KLNM*, 17 (1972), cols. 2–14; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 854–5; G. Dahlbäck, 'Rådmannen i senmedeltidens Stockholm', *Sankt Eriks årsbok*, 1993, pp. 179–96.

44 S. Ljung et al., 'Borgmästare', *KLNM*, 2 (1957), cols. 158–63; Dahlbäck, 'Rådmannen', p. 188; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, p. 534, 854–5; Nedkvitne and Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg*, p. 248–52.

45 Dahlbäck, *I medeltidens Stockholm*, p. 57; E. Kroman, 'Stadsstyrelse, Danmark', *KLNM*, 17 (1972), col. 7.

46 G. A. Blom, 'Stadsstyrelse, Norge', *KLNM*, 17 (1972), col. 13; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 449–52, 532–4, 815–16, 854–5.

47 S. Ljung, *Uppsala under yngre medeltid och Vasatid (Uppsala stads historia, 2, Uppsala, 1954)*, pp. 119–20; S. Kraft, *Från äldsta tid till 1567 (Linköpings historia, 1, Linköping, 1975)*, p. 218.

of German influence was determined by the general political situation in the country. As long as the Crown was strong enough, as it was in the period 1250–1350, limits could be put on German activities, but when the Crown was weakened and placed in the hands of the German Albrecht of Mecklenburg (1365–89) the German influence grew dangerously strong from an indigenous point of view.

Whether there was continuous resentment between natives and Germans in Swedish towns is hard to determine on the basis of surviving sources but there were some incidents that may indicate tensions. In 1389 (or possibly 1392), for example, some Germans of disputed status (they may have been Hanseatic soldiers and not burghers) killed a group of leading merchants in Stockholm. There is also a political pamphlet from 1466, claiming that Germans had been appointed to most official tasks in Stockholm and that the only posts left for Swedes were those of executioner and gravedigger. After the victory of the national Swedish party over the Union troops led by King Christian I at Brunkeberg in 1471 the Swedish towns – in effect Stockholm – wanted the council of the realm to revoke the Townlaw's clause on German representation in the town council so that only Swedes would be elected councillors in the future. The request was granted and the Germans immediately disappeared from the Stockholm council; in most of the other towns, naturalisation and lack of fresh immigration had led to their disappearance long before that.⁴⁸

In Bergen the extra-territorial and dominant position of the Hanseatic *Kontor* at times made tensions between Germans and native townsmen more serious than elsewhere in Scandinavia. In 1455 the Germans attacked their old enemy, the royal captain Olaf Nilsson, in the monastery of Munkeliv; Olaf was killed together with the bishop of Bergen and sixty other Norwegians and the monastery was completely destroyed. In 1523 Germans of the *Kontor* and the craft guilds took advantage of the unstable political situation in the town, forced their way into the town hall, and seized the urban privileges restricting their economic activities. They also attacked the homes of some of the burghers, notably rival merchants of Scottish descent, at least one of them a councillor, savaged members of their households, and plundered their goods. These were, however, unique episodes. Even if the Germans of the *Kontor* generally feared competitors and were hostile to them, they did not normally act violently. They were, however, not particularly disposed to accept the jurisdiction of Norwegian courts in their conflicts with non-Hanseatic parties.

48 Ahnlund, *Stockholms historia*, pp. 207–12, 324–5, 345–9; A. Stedje, 'Käpplingemorden – ett 600-årsminne', *Sankt Eriks årsbok*, 1989, pp. 9–28.

On the other hand, one must not forget that complaints about the Germans in surviving sources often come from parties whose interests were opposed to theirs – irregularities also occurred on the Norwegian side. And there are also examples of entirely normal and amicable relationships between the Germans and the natives of Bergen.⁴⁹

The leading position of the Germans in Bergen should serve to remind us that there were limits to the autonomy of Scandinavian town authorities. Even if a large amount of urban self-management had developed by the end of the Middle Ages the towns were still to a large extent under royal control, as witnessed by the participation and, in Norway, even the presidency of royal representatives in the sessions of the town council. When and where the presence of the Crown was strong the Germans could be controlled; where this was not the case, as in Bergen, urban authorities were not themselves strong enough to do so.

The Crown's leading role in urban development is also shown by the fact that only towns of strategic importance (such as Kalmar and Stockholm in Sweden; Kalundborg, Vordingborg and København in Denmark) had fully developed fortifications while the others only had gates and earthen or wooden ramparts to mark the boundaries of the town (cf. Chapter 11). The general absence of artistically built and impressive city halls, as for instance the ones in Lübeck, Riga and Reval, may also be interpreted as an indication of the limitations of Scandinavian urban autonomy.⁵⁰ Modest town halls or meeting places were, however, erected, and in towns such as Bergen and Stockholm they could be combined with wine-cellar.⁵¹

The town administration was not restricted to the council and its members. In Scandinavian as in other north European towns local officials were appointed to control trade and crafts, internal security and social care. Their number varied greatly according to the size of the towns and little is known of them. However, the lists of Stockholm officials from 1419 onwards shows that about fifty of them were appointed annually: supervisors of the church-treasury, of alms-giving and the alms-house, a night watchman in the church tower, keepers of the keys to the gates in the town wall, controllers of measures, weights and packing, a master of the weigh-house, and others.⁵² Most of them were merchants or craftsmen who served part-time in their official tasks.

49 Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 766–9; Helle, 'The Hanseatic merchants', pp. 27–8.

50 Dahlbäck, *I medeltidens Stockholm*, p. 58; Nedkvitne and Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg*, p. 249.

51 S. Zachrisson et al., 'Rådhus', *KLNM*, 14 (1969), cols. 536–42; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, p. 197.

52 Dahlbäck, *I medeltidens Stockholm*, pp. 63–6.

Being a councillor in one of the bigger towns was no sinecure. In Stockholm, where the minutes of the town council enable us to follow the work of the councillors closely, we know that they met, as prescribed in the Town-law, every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday that was not a church holiday. Throughout the year the council was in session in some eighty of the 110–120 possible meeting-days, from eight in the morning until noon. It is thus easy to understand that those eligible for the council needed a private fortune and a well-established trade which could largely take care of itself.⁵³

Crafts and local trade

In principle there is nothing which distinguishes crafts and local trade in Scandinavian towns from those in other towns of northern and western Europe.⁵⁴ Presumably, all had artisans working in basic trades such as shoemaking, tailoring and smithing, and – as centres of trade with the local peasantry – had been given the right to hold a weekly market. Since most Scandinavian towns were small they did not have the number of artisans, the variety of specialities, and the volume of local trade of many of the bigger European towns. Also within Scandinavia there were obvious differences between larger and smaller towns, as shown by the following examples.

Because of the survival of relevant sources Stockholm is the best-known town in this respect. Tax registers from the 1460s and the early sixteenth century frequently contain not only the names of the assessed persons but also their crafts. In the early 1460s there were between sixty and seventy different trades in Stockholm. Since crafts were not always indicated in the tax registers only minimum numbers of people practising the various trades can be given. Those with more than ten craftsmen in the early 1460s included carpenters (43), fishermen (40), shoemakers (25), tailors (24), masons (17), smiths (13), goldsmiths (11), butchers (11), fur- and leather-tailors (10). On the other hand there were specialities with only one practitioner – for instance pump-maker, wine-merchant, spursmith, seamstress, curbstone-layer, blood-letting woman and pearl-embroiderer.⁵⁵

53 G. Dahlbäck, 'Aldrig på en söndag: Om helgdagar och sammanträdesdagar i det medeltida Sverige', in *Historier från Frescati: En vänbok till Kerstin Israelsson* (Stockholm, 1995), pp. 21–42.

54 S. Ljung et al., 'Hantverkare', *KLNM*, 6 (1961), cols. 216–25; F. Lindberg, *Hantverk och skråväsen under medeltid och äldre vasatid* (Stockholm, 1964); D. Lindström, *Skrå, stad och stat: Stockholm, Malmö och Bergen ca. 1350–1622* (Uppsala, 1991).

55 Dahlbäck, *I medeltidens Stockholm*, pp. 83–100.

In Bergen the Townlaw of King Magnus Law-mender (1274) and bylaws from 1282 mention about thirty different trades of craftsmen and retailers. In addition there were probably minor specialities as in Stockholm. The number of trades was probably at least as large as it was 200 years later. The importance of German artisans grew greatly in the late Middle Ages. Of these the shoemakers were the largest group, counting sixty-two members in 1451. Other important and well-known groups of German artisans were tailors, fur- and leather-tailors, goldsmiths, cloth-shearers, bakers and barbers. It appears that the German artisans altogether numbered about 200 at the end of the Middle Ages.⁵⁶

Twenty-two different trades of craftsmen are known from medieval Oslo and twenty-five from Uppsala, both of them middle-size urban communities by Scandinavian standards. Only fourteen trades are common to both towns: bakers, belt-makers, cloth-shearers, crossbow-makers, fur- and leather-tailors, goldsmiths, joiners, masons, pearl-embroiderers, pewter-makers, shoemakers, smiths, sword-sharpeners and tailors. The others are: in Uppsala barrel-maker, bookbinder, brewer, butcher, carrier, cauldron-maker, painter, porter, saddle-maker, stone-cutter, and strap-maker; and in Oslo carpenter, mintmaster, combmaker, coppersmith, locksmith, roof-layer, spursmith, and woodcarver.⁵⁷

These examples make it clear that middle-size towns would have at least between twenty and thirty acknowledged trades and probably quite a few more specialities that are not mentioned in surviving sources. Even in a small town such as Stavanger, with only a few hundred inhabitants, the sparse evidence bears witness to several medieval trades.⁵⁸

There was local trade with the surrounding agricultural districts in all towns but there is no evidence of its scale. In fifteenth-century Denmark, with its relatively dense urban pattern, many towns sought and received privileges giving the burghers the exclusive right to trade in a surrounding zone and prescribing that the farmers there should sell their products in the urban market place. This may indicate that the burghers sometimes found the profit from local trade too small and the competition with neighbouring towns and the trading activities of the rural population too strong.⁵⁹

56 Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 427–42, 750–2.

57 Nedkvitne and Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg*, p. 269; Ljung, *Uppsala*, p. 180.

58 K. Helle, *Stavanger fra våg til by* (Stavanger, 1975), pp. 158–60.

59 P. Enemark, 'Handelsprivilegier, Danmark', *KLNM*, 6 (1961), cols. 149–53. K. Hørby, 'Tiden fra 1340 til 1523', in A. E. Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 2 (København, 1980), p. 77; Dahlerup, *De fire stænder*, p. 169; Poulsen, 'Land og by'; Enemark, 'Danmarks handel'.

The idea that local trade should be concentrated in towns was in theory accepted in the other Scandinavian kingdoms too, and was adopted in royal Norwegian and Swedish legislation; for example, pedlars were in 1299 forbidden to operate in the Norwegian countryside. A principle of Norwegian royal policy from the end of the thirteenth century was that towns should have a monopoly of not only local but also foreign trade; they were to function as centres for the exchange of goods brought there by producers and merchants. However, the Norwegian and Swedish town pattern was not dense enough for this principle to be carried out in practice and from the mid-fifteenth century the Norwegian crown ceased to forbid trade in the rural districts. Increasingly the burghers acquired the formal right to buy and sell outside their towns, in some cases within a defined and relatively small circumference; Bergen, however, enjoyed an exceptionally large trading district.⁶⁰

Throughout the late Middle Ages the nobility and clergy of all the Scandinavian kingdoms had the right to trade their own products and this could be a major drawback for town merchants engaged in local trade. The importance of such trading is hard to estimate but it appears to have been considerable, as suggested by the fact that at the end of the fifteenth century the cathedral of Uppsala, the most important single institution in that town, spent only 11 per cent, at most, of its total annual expenditure in the town. Most of the cathedral's trade was carried out with Stockholmers who accounted for 16 per cent of its expenditure.⁶¹

Guilds and corporations

Scandinavian towns saw the same types of corporations as other north European towns, such as religious guilds, merchants guilds and craft guilds. Most are known only by name and little is known about their organisation, function and exact purposes. There has been much speculation about their origin and their importance for the development of urban self-government, especially in Denmark. However, the connection between the leading merchant guilds and the town councils, if it ever existed, had disappeared by the fifteenth century. Some guilds appear to have been merchant guilds, for example in towns such as Bergen (St Mary's), Stockholm (St Gertrud's, Our Lady of the German Nation,

60 H. Yrwing, 'Landsköp', *KLNM*, 10 (1965), cols. 282–91; Helle and Nedkvitne, 'Norge', p. 277; Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, p. 812; Helle, 'Down to 1536', pp. 47, 102.

61 G. Dahlbäck, 'En stad i staden: Om domkyrkans ekonomiska betydelse för Uppsala under senmedeltiden', in N. Cnattingius and T. Nevéus (eds.), *Från Östra Aros till Uppsala: En samling uppsatser kring det medeltida Uppsala (Uppsala stads historia, 7, Uppsala, 1986)*, pp. 182–4; cf. Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 816–20.

Our Lady of the Swedish Nation), and København (the German Company, the Danish Company), but there is no indication that they constituted an urban patriciate such as the *Zirkelgesellschaft* of Lübeck.⁶²

Many of the Danish craftsmen were at the end of the Middle Ages organised in guilds with both professional and social purposes. There are signs of a professional organisation of craftsmen in a few towns (Schleswig, Roskilde) by the late thirteenth century but it was not until the fifteenth century that craft guilds became common in larger towns; they are known from eight towns before 1450 and from eighteen around 1500. In many towns only the shoemakers and perhaps also the tailors organised themselves in this fashion. Larger numbers of guilds are only known from Malmö (seven or nine), København (six), Flensburg (six), and Odense (five).⁶³

The towns of the two other kingdoms showed a much lower level of guild organisation than Denmark. There are no signs of craft guilds in most of the Norwegian and Swedish towns, which is another indication that urbanisation was more advanced in Denmark. In Norway there were tendencies towards guild organisation in Bergen in the late thirteenth century but they appear to have been suppressed by a royal edict (1293–4). The craft guilds established in late medieval Bergen were exclusively German corporations. Seven are known from the fifteenth century, the most important being the shoemakers' guild. In Trondheim, too, the German shoemakers were organised in a guild while it is still an open question whether the royal privileges enjoyed by shoemakers in Oslo and Tønsberg indicate a proper guild organisation. With the possible exception of the goldsmiths of Bergen there are no signs of native craft guilds.⁶⁴

In Sweden only Stockholm can be shown to have had a number of guilds. They seem to be fairly late compared with the Danish ones but at the end of the Middle Ages there were apparently about fourteen, the highest number known from any medieval Scandinavian town. They comprised tailors, girdle-makers, carpenters, porters, goldsmiths, shoemakers, butchers, barrel-makers, smiths, coppersmiths, fur- and leather-tailors, barbers, bakers and masons. In other Swedish towns there are, with the exception of Kalmar, only a few passages in written sources that can be interpreted as indicating guild organisation.⁶⁵

62 Dahlbäck, 'Rådmannen', pp. 184, 194–5; H. U. Ramsing, *Københavns historie och topografi i middelalderen*, 2 (København, 1940), pp. 253–8. It has been suggested that St Mary's guild in Bergen had a character similar to that of the *Zirkelgesellschaft* (Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, p. 590).

63 Lindström, *Skrå, stad och stat*, pp. 68–70.

64 Ibid., pp. 75–6; cf. Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad*, pp. 435, 456–7, 752–4; Nedkvitne and Norsereng, *Byen under Eikaberg*, pp. 271–4.

65 Lindström, *Skrå, stad och stat*, pp. 73–5, 242–3.

Generally, the fate and development of Scandinavian towns in the Middle Ages cannot be said to be different in kind from urban development elsewhere in northern and western Europe. The most obvious difference is their relatively small number and size; there was perhaps also less variety. Nevertheless, towns and the urban way of life was of great and growing importance for societal development in Scandinavia throughout the Middle Ages. As politico-administrative, economic and cultural centres the towns influenced society to a far higher degree than their modest share of the total population would suggest. Together with the Church they were the main force in the process which tied Scandinavia more and more closely to the economy and culture of Europe.

The nobility of the late Middle Ages

ERIK ULSIG

Basically, the late medieval lay aristocracy of Denmark, Sweden (including Finland) and Norway was the same. Possession of land was allodial and the roots of the nobility in the near past were twofold; it originated from a class of magnates with much landed property and from men who had entered the king's service. The Law of Jylland (1241) uses the term *herremænd* (pl.), men serving a lord (*herre*) whether king, duke, count or bishop (cf. Chapter 12(b), where another possible meaning is also mentioned). In Sweden the word *frälse* (in origin 'freedom') was sometimes used, focusing on the tax exemption given in return for service.

There were, however, also important differences between the three Scandinavian kingdoms. Norway was the poorest and the privileges of the Norwegian nobility were very limited, while Denmark was the richest and culturally most European kingdom. Sweden (excluding Finland) became increasingly similar to Denmark. As far as possible the two latter kingdoms will be treated together while Norway will in part be dealt with separately. An Icelandic service aristocracy in embryo was created in the thirteenth century when Icelandic magnates became royal liegemen and Iceland was placed under the Norwegian crown (Chapter 12(c)). In the late Middle Ages a few Icelanders received royal patents of nobility and styled themselves *herra* (lord) but a noble class can hardly be said to have been established in Iceland.

The importance of the nobility depended to a great extent on its wealth, mainly in land. The approximate share of landed property in the possession of the nobility at the time of the Reformation in the 1530s was as follows: Denmark 35–40 per cent, Sweden 22 per cent, Norway 15 per cent, and Finland merely 3 per cent (cf. Chapter 10). This distribution had ancient roots but changes took place also in the late Middle Ages. The Church increased its share of land whereas peasant property was still diminishing as late as the fourteenth century. In the second half of that century crown possessions in Denmark doubled from perhaps 5 to 10 per cent at the expense of the nobility. In

Norway, too, the nobility lost property after 1350, partly because of donations to the Church and partly because some of the lesser nobility lost the means necessary for noble service and status and were compelled to live off land they farmed themselves. In Finland a nobility first came into being after 1350. Taking these changes into account, it can nevertheless be said that the distribution of land among the different land-owning groups was fairly stable in late medieval Scandinavia.

The Scandinavian nobility displays a number of characteristics which differentiate it from its European counterparts, the most important and distinctive being the allodial possession of land. Feudal tenure was almost unknown; land was inherited or bought, primarily inherited, and the rules of inheritance¹ were therefore of decisive importance. Primogeniture was unknown but in the provincial laws of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there was an essential difference between Norway and western Sweden on the one hand, where daughters did not inherit if they had brothers (but they received a dowry), and eastern Sweden and Denmark on the other hand, where sons inherited a whole share, daughters a half. The latter principle was adopted in the Norwegian Landlaw of 1274 and for the whole of Sweden in the Landlaw of 1350.

Another important development concerned the right of representation (where a child inherits in place of a dead parent). In the Norwegian provincial laws there is no trace of this principle but it was put into effect, though with limitations, by the Landlaw of 1274. The oldest Danish laws (c. 1200) had, however, already stipulated that in the event of their parents' death children would inherit from their grandparents provided that these had no other surviving children. The later Danish laws (c. 1250) and the Swedish law of Uppland (1296) extended the right of representation, enabling different generations of descendants to share an inheritance. This was in the main accepted by the Swedish Landlaw.

The rules of inheritance, especially the Danish ones, opened the way for a drastic dispersal of landed property while, conversely, an advantageous marriage could bring much property with it. The result was usually, at least in the fifteenth century, that noble estates were widely scattered.

The naming custom of the nobility did not differ from that of common people. A man carried his Christian name to which, for closer identification,

¹ S. Iuul, 'Arveret', *KLNM*, 1 (1965), cols. 260, 262, 265; B. Sawyer, 'Viking Age rune stones as a source for legal history', in A. Dybdahl and J. Sandnes (eds.), *Nordiske middelalderlover: Tekst og kontekst*, Trondheim, 1997, pp. 39–44. Cf. E. Albrechtsen, *Fællelskabet bliver til 1380–1536 (Danmark-Norge 1380–1814)*, 1, Oslo, 1997), pp. 67–9, 230–1.

was added his patronymic, though a small number of noblemen did use a family name (or personal surname). For instance, four generations of the powerful Gyldenstjerne family of Jylland were named Erik Nielsen (mentioned 1325–65), Niels Eriksen (1364–77), Erik Nielsen (1400–48) and Niels Eriksen (1432–84). Not until 1526, when the king ordered the Danish nobility to use family names, did the Gyldenstjerne family take its name from its coat of arms. Another powerful family at that time used the religious symbol of a rosary to create the well-known name Rosenkrantz. Family names were almost unknown in Sweden while in Norway they became more common in the fifteenth century, though characteristically not in the oldest and most distinguished families. Nobility originating from Germany usually kept the family name. To avoid confusion a nobleman could connect his name to his manor; for instance one of the Swedish noblemen in the Kalmar Union documents from 1397 simply called himself Karl *af Tofta*. Moreover, a nobleman's seal with his coat of arms would identify him.

In the late Middle Ages one distinguished between knights and squires (Lat. *milites et armigeri*, German *Ritter und Knappen*). A knight was styled *dominus* or *herre*. Documents always state a man's knighthood while, at least in the fourteenth century, the title of squire could be omitted, making it difficult for the historian to decide whether a man was noble or a freeholding *bonde* (peasant, farmer). This is especially true for Sweden where the ordinary *frälse* (gentry) was not conceived of as proper nobility but rather a cross between nobility and *bønder* (pl. of Scand. *bonde*). Knighthood was only conferred by kings and princes and was not hereditary; the honour could be entirely fortuitous, depending on political circumstances. It was, however, normal that the higher nobility were awarded the accolade, the lesser not.

The fourteenth century

The formation of a Scandinavian nobility was in principle completed by about 1300. In the statute of Alsnö (c. 1280) the Swedish king exempted his own and his brother's men and all their peasants from all royal 'right' and likewise the bishops' squires (OS *swenæ*) and all men serving with a war horse, 'whoever they may serve' (cf. Chapter 12(d)). In other words, men serving bishops and secular lords were exempted from royal taxation on a par with those serving the king directly. Despite uncertainties with regard to the precise status of the categories mentioned and the extent of their exemption, the statute shows that a comprehensive service nobility had been created in Sweden.

No corresponding explicit source material exists in Denmark. It is, however, possible to observe a struggle between king and duke, counts, and bishops over the control of their men. The Law of Jylland of 1241 shows that tax exemption was more limited than in the Alsnö statute inasmuch as the majority of the bishops' and nobility's peasants were probably not exempted from tax, but by 1300 exemption had developed along the Swedish lines.

In Norway things were different. The legislation of King Magnus Lawmender in the 1270s laid down very limited tax exemption for the king's and the bishops' men, thus finally formalising the development of a service nobility within the framework of the royal *hirð* (Chapter 12(c)). However, prominent royal liegemen received a degree of compensation in the form of local administrative appointments, which with the passing of time tended to develop into fiefs (ON *sýslur* or *lén*), a development not known in Sweden and Denmark. Before 1350 the king accepted that not only barons (*lendir menn*) but also the secular aristocracy in general had men in their service. Tax exemption in Norway never came to comprise the tenants of the privileged classes but taxation was on the other hand more limited than in the two other kingdoms.

Mobility between *bønder* and low nobility continued in the fourteenth century. The Swedish Landlaw of 1350 laid down that at the annual inspection of the nobility's weapons a *bonde* could present himself with horse and weapons and thereby obtain *frälse*. Accordingly, in 1390 Sixten Olufsen begged to be taken into the service of the realm according to the law of the land, and was accepted. Characteristic of the new age was that this was now confirmed by the representative of the Crown in writing.²

In the statute of Alsnö and later in Norwegian legislation from about 1350 the nobility's men-at-arms were accepted as serving the realm and thus qualifying for tax exemption, but there is no explicit information on the men-at-arms of the Danish nobility for whom the terminology is regrettably vague. The men in question, including those of the bishops, were described as *pueri*, *armigeri*, *famuli*, and their lords bequeathed horses, sometimes weapons and armour or even land to them. It may, however, be anachronistic to ask whether they belonged to the nobility; suffice it to note that they enjoyed their lord's tax exemption and followed him in war for the king.

Swedish royal statutes of 1330, 1335 and 1344 demonstrate the difficulties of applying the concept of nobility; they distinguish between (1) *swenæ* who were members of the council and knights (whether in the council or not),

2 C. Molbech and N. M. Petersen (eds.), *Udvalg af hidtil utrykte Danske Diplomer og Breve fra 14., 15. og 16. Aarhundrede* (København, 1842–59), no. 15.

(2) *swenæ* who were the equals of knights, and (3) lesser men or common *frälse*; or in the contemporary Latin texts between *militēs*, *militares et alios armigeri*. In the fifteenth century one can still meet with formulations which, though not consistently, seek to differentiate between the chivalry, both knights and squires, and common *frälse*. In Sweden, then, there are glimpses of a line drawn between the old aristocracy and new men rising from the ranks of *bønder*.³

In Denmark there are only indications of a corresponding distinction. Recruitment from *bønder*, even quite simple ones, is known from the Law of Jylland where the recruits are termed *herremænd*, and the town law of København (1254 and 1294) differentiates between knights and *homines domino-rum*, *vulgariter herremænd*. In the fourteenth century only knights and squires are mentioned, but interestingly enough men whom one would consider as belonging to the high nobility are addressed as *virī nobiles* while others had to be content with being called *virī discreti* or *discreti et honesti*.

In reality the social and economic differences within the nobility were enormous, for example that between Sixten Olufsen and Bo Jonsson, the Swedish *drots* (seneschal), who in conflict with King Albrecht controlled half the royal castles in the years preceding 1386; or, to take a Danish example, between an ordinary village squire and the Jylland magnate Stig Andersen who around 1340 erected his stronghold Bjørnholm in Djursland, which contemporaries compared with the royal castle Skanderborg. Stig was one of the king's leading counsellors until 1359 when he suspected the king of having conspired to cause the death of his son. On that occasion he founded requiem masses in the cathedrals of Lübeck, Århus and Viborg, in the Dominican monasteries of Lübeck and Århus, in the monastery of Antvorskov, and probably in other places as well. He donated a Sjælland manor to Antvorskov, paid for the vaulting of the Dominicans' church in Århus and for a chapel in their church in Lübeck.

Tax exemption induced the Swedish and Danish nobility to gain more land. To the annoyance of the Crown many noblemen found it profitable to acquire property from land-owning, tax-paying *bønder*. The Law of Jylland of 1241 and later King Magnus Eriksson of Sweden tried to stop pro forma transfers 'where each keeps his own' while the king lost his taxes.⁴ Later Magnus and his contemporary Valdemar IV of Denmark tried to prevent the nobility from acquiring *bonde* property altogether, but when Albrecht of Mecklenburg took

3 The above description of the Swedish nobility/*frälse* is mainly based on K. E. Löfquist, *Om riddarväsen och frälse i nordisk medeltid* (Lund, 1935), and J. Rosén, 'Frälse', *KLNM*, 4 (1959), cols. 687–92. E. Sjöholm, *Sveriges medeltidslagar* (Lund, 1988), pp. 228–92, considers the mention in the statute of Alsnö of 'all men serving with a war horse whoever they may serve' as a later addition.

4 *Diplomatarium Suecanum*, 5:1, no. 3864; *Sverges Traktater*, 2, p. 655.

power in Sweden in 1363 and Valdemar was defeated in 1368–70 the Crown once more lost its grip on the situation.

The main obligation of the nobility to the king was to perform military service. In the royal election charters of 1320 and 1326 the Danish nobility insisted on limitations to their military service abroad. This is not to say that they were not bellicose; on the contrary, it was precisely in the fourteenth century that Danish and Swedish noblemen were at pains to fortify their manor houses. A very great number of *voldsteder* (castle mounds) exist in Denmark, most of them probably dating back to the fourteenth century. In 1396 Queen Margrethe forbade the Danish and Swedish nobility to build castles or keeps 'since very little justice has come from the castles that have now been built'.⁵ It appears that the ban was largely observed until 1483 when the aristocracy regained its right of fortification. However, whereas Count Gerhard of Holstein and Valdemar IV in the fourteenth century had to conquer the nobility's castles, it seems doubtful whether many fifteenth-century noblemen had the resources for effective castle building. In Norway a couple of aristocratic strongholds known from the end of the thirteenth century appear to have been exceptional, and late medieval nobles never fortified their residences.

One well-known aspect of aristocratic mentality was the feud. In 1340 Count Gerhard was slain by Niels Ebbesen, and before the Jylland nobility entered into an alliance with the Holsteiners against King Valdemar in 1351, Niels' family had to pay wergild to Gerhard's sons. In 1355 twenty-four Danish aristocrats headed by the bishop of Århus and the *drost* (seneschal) gave Valdemar and his people a letter of *orfejde* (out of feud) for the killing of a Jylland nobleman. In 1405 the Jylland judge Jens Nielsen of Avnsbjerg slew Jens Jensen (Brok) of Clausholm. Thereafter, in the presence of Queen Margrethe and King Erik, he had to issue a letter to the victim's father, Jens Andersen of Estrup, and to Jens Jensen's sons, kith and kindred. Apart from all the requiem masses and pilgrimages he undertook to arrange and carry out he had to promise that he would, with 200 knights and squires, beg Jens Andersen's and his grandsons' forgiveness with the words: 'Were I the best and mightiest knight in Denmark, even so would I have accepted such an atonement'.⁶ The examples mentioned show the efforts that were made to prevent or stop feuds between the powerful men of the kingdom.

In 1396 Margrethe had attained an exceedingly powerful position. The ban on the erection of private fortifications was followed by a policy which was to have far-reaching consequences in both Sweden and Denmark. The Swedish

5 E. Kroman (ed.), *Den danske Rigslovgivning indtil 1400* (København, 1971), pp. 335, 340.

6 A. Huitfeldt, *Danmarks Rigs Krønike* (1594–1603), 4, pp. 178–9.

ordinance (*recess*) of Nyköping laid down that Crown property and taxable, i.e. *bonde*, property, which since 1363 had come into the possession of the privileged classes, should revert to its original state. Court sentences bear witness to the thoroughness of the restitution, though it first and foremost affected those outside the old nobility, i.e. representatives of the Mecklenburg rule. The corresponding Danish ordinance fixed the time limit at King Valdemar's departure for Germany in 1368. No court sentences have been recorded but to the end of her reign Queen Margrethe continued to acquire land from the nobility, some by purchase and some by coercion with reference to her father's previous acquisition of the land in question. The idea that what was the Crown's taxable land should remain so had consequences for the distinction between nobility and *bønder*. In the ordinance of Nyköping it was stipulated that men who had obtained tax exemption since 1363 should prove its legality or lose it. There is no corresponding Danish provision but a court sentence from 1406 shows the same practice; the men in question, having failed to prove their legal exemption, were forced to pay the normal freeholder dues including arrears and a fine to boot.

Control of accession to the ranks of the nobility from the fourteenth century gradually led to the issuing of royal patents of nobility; by the fifteenth century they were common. Admittedly, not many patents have survived in Denmark, but then there was no reason to retain them after 1536 when it was evident who was or was not noble. The connection between the Crown's control of *bonde* property and of accession to the nobility is most clearly evidenced in Finland but Swedish court decisions show it too: 'They had taken the king's taxes without his consent and unlawfully made themselves into *frälse*'.⁷

The years on both sides of 1400 may be said to mark an epoch in the history of the nobility; nobles were now clearly separated from *bønder*. In Denmark they were henceforth usually addressed as 'well-born', in Sweden more commonly as 'free-born', both epithets emphasising the criterion of birth. In the time to come the Crown would zealously ensure that *bonde* property was not reduced, and after the reign of Margrethe distribution of land between Crown, nobility and *bønder* was firmly established.

The fifteenth century

In the latter half of the fourteenth century the number of noblemen in Norway and Denmark decreased. The Norwegian low nobility was drastically

⁷ Löfqvist, *Om riddarväsen*, p. 225.

weakened by the loss of income which followed the fall in population. There is little evidence of the situation of the Danish low nobility but several hitherto wealthy noblemen had to sell land to more fortunate peers. The fifteenth century saw a reduction of the Norwegian high nobility, not previously very numerous, which undermined the independence of the kingdom. In Denmark and parts of Sweden the low nobility was weakened whereas the high nobility flourished in both kingdoms.

A main feature of the fifteenth-century high nobility was their widely dispersed estates. The situation was probably the same in all three kingdoms but the Danish magnate Axel Lagesen (Brok), whose estates are particularly well known, is a good example.⁸ At the time of his death in 1498 he and his deceased wife had accumulated a vast amount of property, four manor houses and 601 tenant holdings. His most important manor was Clausholm to the south of Randers, comprising his demesne farm and 195 peasant holdings stretching as far south as Vejle. His other property in Jylland included Skærvad in Djursland with fifty-four holdings and about thirty-three holdings in Vendsyssel. In northern Sjælland he owned Græse with sixty-three holdings. Gunderslevholm in southern Sjælland was his wife's hereditary estate but about two-thirds of the accompanying 225 tenant holdings, which were spread over half of Sjælland, were Axel's inheritance. Finally he owned twelve peasant holdings in Skåne and nineteen in Fyn.

Most of the property was Axel Lagesen's paternal inheritance. From his mother he inherited the property between Vejle and Århus and from his father's sister the nineteen holdings in Fyn and about one-third of the holdings under Gunderslevholm. Throughout his long life Axel Lagesen exchanged property in order to improve the scattered and rather haphazard geographical position of estates which was the result of the family's marriage arrangements and consequent inheritance. Half of Skærvad's adjoining tenant holdings were acquired in this way, mostly for property in Vendsyssel, but despite his efforts he never succeeded in exchanging the whole of his property in this remote part of the country, nor in Skåne or Fyn. The only district where Axel Lagesen actually bought land was in the vicinity of Clausholm where he usually lived; here he purchased a number of peasant holdings from the local low nobility.

Not only were estates dispersed, but the individual holdings belonging to each estate were also widely scattered and there were often many owners in the

8 E. Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser i middelalderen* (Skrifter udgivet af Det historiske institut ved Københavns universitet, København, 1968), pp. 295–6.

same village. There were two main reasons for this, the basic one being that the tenant system with its emphasis on land-rent in kind or money, not on labour service, did not require tenant holdings to lie close to the demesne. The direct cause, however, was the rules of inheritance, attaching great importance to the right of each heir to inherit equally well situated land, which in practice could mean equally badly situated possessions. A somewhat exaggerated example is furnished by the administration of a deceased nobleman's landed property in Fyn in 1504. There was no demesne farm and the ninety-five tenants were scattered throughout thirty-five villages, an instance of what in German is called *Streugut*. The property was now split up at random, even in the single villages, between three brothers and one sister into seven parts. Finally the heirs drew lots!⁹

However, in many cases a widely dispersed estate complex was the result of deliberate accumulation. The holdings in the Fyn example above had been amassed by the energetic *homo novus* Eggert Frille. The reason why purchased tenant holdings were so often scattered was that purchases demanded sellers, and the only sellers in fifteenth-century Denmark were the impoverished low nobility; so where the holdings were situated was mostly a matter of chance.

Landownership within the ranks of the fifteenth-century Danish high nobility was stable. As we saw in the case of Axel Lagesen, the inheritance factor was crucial. In Sweden the complicated and troubled political situation tended to make for greater mobility. For example, a great estate complex changed hands by sale from Sten Turesson (Bielke) to the *drots* (seneschal) Krister Nilsson (Vasa) and from his heirs to Karl Knutsson whose daughters sold it to Sten Sture the elder. Karl and Sten Sture used their political power to acquire noble estates. In his election charter of 1483 King Hans vowed not to buy land from the nobility; the clause was mostly intended for Swedish use as the Danish monarchy since Margrethe's time had purchased very little property, and the little they had bought was donated to requiem masses.

In Denmark the stability of landownership is witnessed by the fact that the leading families maintained their position throughout the fifteenth century. Some families of course died out in the male line but continued to exist through a flourishing female line, as when the lineage of the Lunge family was continued through the marriage of Cecilie Ovesdatter Lunge (sister of Axel Lagesen's wife) to Torben Bille. Examples of great family estates being inherited through the female line are to be found in all three Scandinavian countries. The greatest Norwegian landowner in the fifteenth century was

9 Ibid., pp. 114, 445–6.

Sigurd Jonsson of the Sørum family from which he descended through the female line; his mother was a daughter of Sigurd Havtoresson of Sørum. The Swedish magnate Nils Bosson (Natt och Dag) called himself Nils Sture after his maternal grandfather. His son Svante Nilsson reverted to the patronymic while Svante's son used the Sture name. Legally, as for example in cases of compensation for manslaughter, one did not distinguish between paternal and maternal kinship.

From an overall perspective the success or decline of the individual family is of little significance but it should be stressed that the low nobility as a class were in difficulties. Over the years one or another of their demesnes (sometimes a mere peasant holding) would disappear, donated perhaps to the Church or purchased by one of the richer nobility. Men of the high nobility would sometimes systematically purchase property from the low nobility. Abraham Brodersen (d. 1408), a man of obscure Halland origin, became Queen Margrethe's counsellor and as castellan controlled extensive Swedish–Danish border areas where he unashamedly acquired land from widows and petty nobility, possibly amassing some 500 holdings. Arvid Trolle (d. 1505) came to possess a great number of tenant holdings in Småland, most of them certainly purchased, while Eskil Gøye (d. 1506) wiped out half of Lolland's low nobility. In some regions or districts the decline in the number of manors has been investigated. In Västergötland thirty-four manors are known in the period 1360–99 and thirty-six in 1400–29. But in the periods 1490–1519 and 1520–42 there were only nine left.¹⁰ In Stevns in Sjælland half of the twelve manors known in 1370–99 had disappeared by 1450.

As it is hard to understand how the most humble of the low nobility ever managed to exist it is also difficult to explain why they fared so much worse in the fifteenth century, but falling income from their few tenants and rising expenditure was probably the cause. The lesser noblemen became dependent on paid service to the Church, Crown or high nobility. Dependence on the patronage of magnates can be seen as early as the close of the fourteenth century in Stevns where the low nobility flocked around the Lunge family at Højstrup. Better still, one could be fortunate enough to secure oneself a sizable tenancy. The manor of Ellinggård in Vendsyssel was the residence of a long line of lesser noblemen for a hundred years following 1440 but the owners were the Gyldenstjerne family of Ågård. Similarly four out of five squires named in a document from 1458 lived on holdings belonging to the monastery of St Peter in Næstved and the bishops' estates were largely administered by bailiffs

¹⁰ L.-O. Larsson, *Det medeltida Västergötland* (Lund, 1964), pp. 381–2.

from the lower rungs of the low nobility. When the king required military service from bishops and monasteries such men could be mustered.

Some of Denmark's mightiest noblemen lived in Djursland in Jylland. In controversies between the great landowners the low nobility could be squeezed, as happened to Jes Henriksen Prip of Lille Torup. His immediate neighbour was the powerful Lage Brok of Estrup but his connections were with Otte Nielsen (Rosenkrantz) of Bjørnholm, and one of his sons was Otte's trusted servant. Lage Brok, who had never been favoured with a royal post, harassed all of them unceasingly. When in 1466 the change of political climate in Denmark brought Lage Brok the appointment as castellan of Koldinghus, Jes Henriksen obviously felt ill at ease and exchanged his estate, consisting of a small demesne with seven tenant holdings in the same village, with one of Lage Brok's estates far from Djursland and the vicinity of Estrup.¹¹

It was not uncommon for magnates to use lesser noblemen as bailiffs but more frequently they made use of men of humbler origin. Most of the patents of nobility issued by the king at the instigation of magnates or bishops applied to men in their service who as a rule were granted a coat of arms derived from their patron's. In numerous other cases where patents are not known, men-at-arms of the high nobility and other lesser noblemen had coats of arms that were similar to or variations of those of the well-known noble families. It appears, then, that promotions to noble status were much more frequent than evidenced by the extant patents.¹²

In the first half of the fourteenth century the great Danish landowners had generally used the *villicus* or *bryde* system but with the decline of population after 1350 the largest and the smallest holdings disappeared and average-size, but still quite big, tenant holdings came to dominate (Chapter 10). On the great estates in Denmark and Sweden the number of demesne farms was reduced and the lord became a rentier, receiving fixed rent in money or kind from his tenants. It was of course practical if the tenant farms were within easy distance of the lord's residence which was the centre of administration, but this was not strictly necessary. As we have seen, many of the holdings were dispersed over considerable distances.

Though the rent system with its numerous tenant holdings belonging to the great estates has been emphasised, it is appropriate to point out that the nobility still possessed very large demesne farms, perhaps ten times the size of a peasant holding. Tenants' dues were received at the demesne farms,

¹¹ Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser*, p. 220.

¹² On the low nobility, cf. T. Dahlerup, 'Lavadelens krise i dansk senmiddelalder', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 12:4 (København, 1969), pp. 1–43.

which were centres of a complex production system intended to satisfy the needs of the lord and his retinue. Consequently, the demesne farm needed a large labour force, and haymaking, ploughing and harvesting required labour service from the tenants. The nearest peasants gave one day's labour per week, with more being required during harvest season. In Denmark many others worked two to eight days per year; in Sweden legally eight or twelve days, but in reality probably six. Peasants living at some distance from the demesne farm obviously did not render labour service.

The large manors housed a great many people and at times a large number of guests. On the Gyldenstjerne manor in Ågård there were in 1499 fifteen or sixteen people attached to the home farm and some fifty to the manor-house itself, including noble and non-noble retainers. Enormous quantities of food were consumed. According to an inventory from 1495 the cellars contained thirty barrels of butter, 600 barrels of grain, and eighty livestock carcasses. Seven-and-a-half barrels of the butter had been supplied from Ålborg, showing that the manor's own production from fifty-two cows and the tenants' dues in butter did not suffice. However, most of the grain must have been intended for sale.¹³

The tenants' dues were mostly paid in kind, making it necessary for the nobility to export the surplus products in order to obtain money. There were two reasons why the landowner had little influence on the choice of products for export. First, the tenants' dues were governed by custom and geographical conditions, and secondly, the structure of the estate had been established by inheritance and chance purchase. Within certain limits, however, landowners could decide which products were to be delivered by the peasants. Tenants in the vicinity of the manor-house supplied the manorial kitchen with poultry, eggs, porkers and fatstock. In Västmanland peasants often delivered iron which they did not produce but could easily buy. At the end of the period a marked interest in the production of heifers for export can be observed in Denmark.

Oluf Stigsen's life-style in south-eastern Skåne exemplifies the extravagances of the magnates. He built the magnificent manor-house of Bollerup, still standing, and in 1503 celebrated his daughter's wedding in style. His own notes on the wedding expenses have been preserved, showing that he paid 2,000 marks in cash for bridal attire, carriage, wine, German beer, etc. In addition his own estates supplied him with an enormous amount of produce. In order

¹³ Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser*, pp. 371–2; T. Dahlerup, *De fire stænder* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, 6, København, 1989), p. 120.

to raise the necessary capital Oluf in 1497–1504 had to mortgage forty-seven peasant holdings and a great house in Malmö for 4,650 marks.¹⁴

The class consciousness and privileges of the nobility were increasing. Nobility by birth was emphasised. Free trade was demanded ‘for the requirements of manor and table’ and, for peasants in the vicinity of the demesne, exemption from the many additional royal taxes meant that more could be demanded of them by the lords; both demands can be seen as a reaction against the Crown’s increasing burden of demands on its subjects. In the Kalmar Recess of 1483 the Swedish nobility claimed to be ‘king over its tenants’ but it was the Danish nobility which actually implemented that claim. From ancient times Danish nobles had the right to collect minor fines from their peasants, but in 1513 and 1523 they were granted the right to collect the heavier royal fines together with the right, and duty, to prosecute. However, the judicial authority remained with the courts (cf. Chapter 19).

Finland and Norway

The Finnish nobility was established as a service aristocracy, though the possibility of roots in an old class of chieftains has been discussed. The beginning was made in the reign of Albrecht of Mecklenburg (1363–89) and a number of the subsequent leading families were consequently of German origin. In the ordinance of Nyköping of 1396 an attempt was made to put in order a situation which had evolved more by chance than design. In 1405 the Finnish *frälse* was exposed to legal control of its freedom and exemption from tax on landed property, and in 1407 King Erik of Pomerania issued patents of nobility to all men of *frälse*. Military service was of course important but the main function of the nobility was to build up a royal administration. A division of the land into *härader* (hundreds) was implemented and posts as heads of the *härad* courts were given to immigrant nobles who were soon assimilated. Opportunities for the nobility were also offered by the Church and especially the bishop.

From Sweden the Finnish nobility was regarded as local and the royal castles were held by Swedish magnates. Finns, however, became members of the Swedish council of the realm. Though only rarely attending council meetings, they gradually came to function in Finland as a department of the council attending especially to Finnish affairs. As a Finnish nobility evolved, so immigration ceased.

¹⁴ Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser*, pp. 371–2.

The more prominent Finnish noblemen had official posts which gave them sufficient income to invest in landed property but the numerous low nobility often possessed only the farm on which they lived. Around 1530 the nobility owned no more than 3.1 per cent or 1,072 of the farms in Finland, of which no fewer than 249 were demesne farms. Almost all of the nobility's lands were situated on the coastal plain.¹⁵

The history of the late medieval Norwegian nobility presents a singular picture. From a relatively strong internal position before 1350 it had declined so far by 1513 that King Christian II in his election charter could declare that 'the nobility of Norway is almost extinct', a rather exaggerated statement, but in fact there were almost no other men of high noble rank left than the two attending negotiations in København.

The catastrophic decline of population starting with the Black Death in 1349–50 and the consequent desertion of farms and holdings drastically reduced the income basis of Crown, Church and aristocracy (Chapter 18). The low nobility was particularly hard hit by the fall in land-rents and suffered further financial difficulties by the Crown's strongly reduced capacity for upholding an administrative network and remunerating *hirð* service. Altogether, there may have been about 600 noble families in Norway before the Black Death of which hardly more than twenty can be said to have belonged to the high nobility. A hundred years later there may not have been more than 200 noble families left.

The weakening of the high nobility in the second half of the fourteenth century is shown by the number of Swedish–Norwegian marriages, most often Norwegian on the female side, presumably because it was difficult to find suitable matches in Norway. A positive effect was that the immigrant Swedes were easily assimilated and at the same time a number of the lower nobility advanced in status to the ranks of the high nobility. However, in the fifteenth century the effect of the general decline of population became manifest to the degree that it was difficult to mobilise a sufficient number of prominent noblemen to represent the country in inter-Scandinavian policy meetings. From the mid-century families died out one after the other and almost no new ones emerged. In south-eastern Norway a great deal of Danish and German immigration and intermarriage took place. The Dane Hartvig Krummedike married an heiress with about 225 peasant holdings and

¹⁵ E. Orrman, 'Den vårdsliga frälsejordens lokalisering i Finland under medeltiden och 1500-talet', in H. Ilsøe and B. Jørgensen (eds.), *Plov og pen: Festskrift til Svend Gissel 4. januar 1991* (København, 1991), pp. 137–49.

both he and his son Henrik were instruments of the Danish royal power in Norway.

The Norwegian high nobility fared even worse than the population in general, in numbers as well as property, though a few were outstandingly wealthy. Erling Vidkunsson, *drottsete* (seneschal) and leader of the Norwegian government during Magnus Eriksson's minority in the 1320s, was the owner of the estates of Bjarkøy in south Troms and Giske in Sunnmøre. His daughter Ingebjørg married Sigurd Havtoresson (d. 1392) of Sørum, east of Oslo. Sigurd's and his wife's estates c. 1349 comprised more than 9 per cent of the nobility's total landed property in Norway, i.e. more than 1,100 tenant holdings. Two generations later these estates belonged to Sigurd Jonsson (d. 1453), seneschal and leader of the Norwegian government in the late 1430s and 1440s. His landed property in western and northern Norway has been assessed at 800 holdings;¹⁶ in addition came his considerable property in eastern Norway. As the number of holdings in Norway had been more than halved since the Black Death and the nobility's total landed property reduced to less than a third of what it had been before the Black Death, Sigurd's lands amounted to a much greater percentage of the nobility's property than the 9 per cent of his grandparents'. There was only room for one Sigurd Jonsson in late medieval Norway where the nobility's holdings now amounted to less than 4,000 holdings, in contrast with the at least 25,000 holdings possessed by the Danish nobility and each giving on average double the amount in rent.

About the year 1500 a part of Sigurd Jonsson's former estates belonged to Otte Mattsson, the last male heir of the Rømer family. He was succeeded by his daughter Inger who was married to the *rikshovmester* (seneschal) Nils Henriksson of Austråt in Trøndelag, the last male heir of the Gyldenløve family. Another major share of Sigurd's estates was owned by Knut Ålvsson, killed in 1502 by Henrik Krummedike. His two sons were killed in 1520 and the estate inherited by his daughter was transferred, thanks to her marriage to Svante Nilsson, to one of the great noble Swedish families. The many daughters of Inger of Austråt were married to Danes. The Norwegian high nobility was now almost extinct.

The decline of the high nobility in Norway has been the subject of much discussion among historians. It has been suggested that a contributing factor

16 O. J. Benedictow, 'Norge', in *Den nordiske Adel i Senmiddelalderen: Struktur, funktioner og internordiske relationer* (Rapporter til Det nordiske Historikermøde i København 1971, 9–12 August, København, 1971), p. 34, with reference to P. Ø. Sandberg, 'Jordeboka over Hans Sigurdssons norske godskompleks' (unpublished thesis, University of Oslo, 1970).

was the absence of a resident monarch and the accompanying court nobility.¹⁷ However, the fundamental cause probably lies in the fact that the Norwegian high nobles had never been numerous enough to create a sustainable stratum of society and the plague epidemics brought them to a new low from which it was impossible to recover. It is generally accepted that an upper class, small in numbers and with limited opportunities for recruitment from other classes, is destined to die out. Even if the low nobility and the top layer of the *bønder* in Norway were thriving at the end of the period,¹⁸ men from their ranks were not able to assume the role left by the high nobility, which was consequently filled by Danes or Swedes.

King and aristocracy

The mainstay of the developed high and late medieval system of government in Scandinavia was the secular and ecclesiastical aristocracy. Norwegian historians of recent generations have been aware of this fact and of the interdependence of the nobility and royal power, stressing the roots of the late medieval nobility in the service aristocracy of the high medieval royal *hirð*. Danish and Swedish historians, on their part, have been inclined to interpret and describe the political development as fundamentally a conflict between king and nobility, a point of view also shared by Norwegian historians of the nineteenth century. This overlooks, however, the fact that the medieval royal power could not function for any length of time without the cooperation of the landowning aristocracy and vice versa. This is demonstrated by the dissolution of Danish royal power after Erik Menved's death in 1319, caused by violent clashes between king and nobility. The victors were not, however, the Danish aristocracy but the Holstein counts and their noblemen who were mortgagees of Danish fiefs and constables of the royal castles.

With the disappearance of the royal power it became apparent that the other seemingly national institutions (*Danehof* and royal council) could not function. The Church and nobility of Skåne called upon the Swedish king to become their sovereign. Meanwhile the Jylland nobility revived their old tradition of rebellion; Count Gerhard of Holstein was killed and Valdemar IV had to face three uprisings during his reign. Valdemar's undisputed power base became Sjælland where he had the full support of the nobility and the bishop, but to a great extent he based his power on men outside the nobility, in

17 Cf. Albrechtsen, *Fællesskabet*, pp. 167–9, 230–1.

18 H. Bjørkvik, *Folketap og sammenbrudd 1350–1520* (K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norgeshistorie*, 4, Oslo, 1996), pp. 49, 83, 101–2.

the 1350s a lower class of castle wardens and in the 1360s increasingly German noblemen. When Valdemar was absent from the country in the years 1368–71 the council of the realm, which consisted of loyal Danish and German nobles, especially castle wardens, was able to govern the country. Though Valdemar was continually in conflict with most of the Jylland nobility he nevertheless contrived to strengthen the unity of the country and the royal power. On his death his daughter Margrethe came to terms with the Jyllanders. Things reverted to their normal state, i.e. friction but not war.

The main controversy between Crown and nobility in the fifteenth century was over the appointment of constables to the royal castles. The Swedish Landlaw of 1350 stipulated that the king should rule the land with indigenous men but in all three kingdoms Queen Margrethe and King Erik of Pomerania decided almost independently whom they wished to favour with these coveted posts. When Erik's sovereign policy failed in the years 1436–9 the Swedish council of the realm succeeded in replacing the Danish and German constables with Swedes, while in Denmark the changes came about on the demise of the Crown in 1439. The Danish election charter of Christian I from 1448 contains a list of the council's demands to the king concerning the government of the realm. Most of these had in fact been observed by Erik, the exception being the claims concerning the castles. The king was now obliged to consult with the council before appointing constables to the castles and foreigners were excluded from such posts – a confirmation in no uncertain terms of what had been the bone of contention between Erik and the nobility.¹⁹

The keen interest in the royal castles shown by the nobility is understandable. To the magnates as a group possession of the castles ensured control of the Crown's policies. To the individual nobleman a post as warden offered considerable income together with political and military importance; if his private property lay within the boundaries of the castle domain he was assured of an exceptionally strong local position. But even the lesser fiefs, consisting of one or two *herreder* or a separate crown estate, were coveted as a supplement to one's own estate.

Enfeoffment policy remained a crucial problem to the end of the period. It was essential both for the king and the Swedish regent (*riksföreståndare*) to have a central part of the country, the *fådebud* (pantry), at their disposal, administered by bailiffs of the lower nobility. However, when King Hans took the liberty of appointing low nobility or, worse, ignoble bailiffs to Jylland's castles it led to the

¹⁹ Cf. E. Ulsig, 'Rigsråd – kongemagt – union 1434–1449', *Historie: Jyske Samlinger*, N.R., 14 (1981), pp. 85–92.

following comment in the negotiations over the election charter of Christian II: 'The baseborn and those who have bought privileges of nobility have castles and fiefs and are judges over the clergy and the knighthood.' When Christian II attempted to follow his father's policies he was deposed in 1523.

In the long run, the use of German constables and bailiffs by the Crown up to 1436–9 left surprisingly few traces on the Danish and Swedish high nobility. When they were no longer of use to the king their position depended entirely upon whether they had acquired substantial landed property – and a prerequisite for this was marriage into the real high nobility, which rarely happened.

When one considers the whole of the fifteenth century, a picture emerges of a never-ending tug-of-war between the Crown and the nobility. The lay and ecclesiastical aristocracy could depose a king and summon a new one, as happened on two occasions in Denmark. It was characteristic that the leading noblemen in 1439 were Jyllanders and that in 1523 they were all from Jylland; there was now no place for foreigners, burghers, or peasants to play a leading role on such occasions. On the other hand, the nobility at times depended on the king to keep the peasants in place. Despite these conflicts, Crown and nobility were two sides of the same coin, mutually indispensable.

Church and clergy

LARS HAMRE

The beginning as well as the end of the period 1350–1520 is marked by historical events of considerable significance both in Nordic and general European church history.¹ In 1350 most churches with their institutions faced the acute as well as the long-term effects of the Black Death. The year 1520, on the other hand, was the year in which Luther definitely broke with the papacy, publishing two of his main programmatic works, *An den Adel deutscher Nation* and the treatise on the Babylonian captivity of the Church, and burning the papal bull of excommunication. It was also the year of the ‘Stockholm Massacre’ in which two bishops were executed in flagrant disregard of *privilegium canonis*.

In 1350 the Church, like the State, faced new and great challenges just when its resources had been greatly reduced. Its national and international organisation was in principle still intact, and in Scandinavia no doubts were raised about its *raison d’être*. In 1520, however, questions were raised about its organisation, teaching and practices.

At the beginning of the period the Danish ecclesiastical sphere of influence had already been reduced by the sale of Estonia to the Teutonic Order in 1347. In the course of the period the Norwegian church province lost several of its suffragan sees. In 1349 the bishop of the Hebrides (Sodor) was exempted by the pope from his obligation to visit his metropolitan, the archbishop of Nidaros. The papal schism also led to a division of the see, as Man was subordinated to York in the fifteenth century and to Canterbury in the

1 For late medieval Nordic church history in general, see J. L. Balling and P. G. Lindhardt, *Den nordiske kirkes historie* (2nd edn, København, 1967); Y. Brilioth, *Den senare medeltiden* (H. Holmquist and H. Pleijel (eds.), *Svenska kyrkans historia*, 2, Uppsala, 1941); N. K. Andersen, *Senmiddelalderen 1241–1448* (H. Koch and B. Kornerup (eds.), *Den danske kirkes historie*, 2, København, 1962); N. K. Andersen, *Den danske kirkes historie under kongerne Christiørn I og Hans* (ibid., 3:1, København 1965); P. G. Lindhardt, *Reformationstiden 1513–1536* (ibid., 3:2, København, 1965); J. Helgason, *Islands Kirke*, 1–2 (København, 1922–5); O. Kolsrud, *Noregs Kyrkesoga I. Millomalderen* (Oslo, 1958).

sixteenth century, while the Hebrides (*Episcopatus Insularum*), for a period directly subordinated to the pope, followed the obedience of Avignon like the other Scottish sees and was in 1472 together with Orkney subordinated to the recently established province of St Andrews. The archbishop of Nidaros protested, but to no avail. Greenland nominally remained a suffragan see of Trondheim throughout the period and bishops were appointed in a continuous succession, some of whom functioned – analogous to the *episcopi in partibus infidelium* – as assistant bishops (*chorepiscopi*) in Norway and Denmark. However, relations between Greenland and the Norwegian church came to an end at the same time as Greenland's administrative and commercial relations with Norway ended – in the last years of the fourteenth century (cf. Chapter 18).

Though territorial expansion was out of the question for the Nordic church provinces in this period, both the Norwegian and the Swedish church evangelised among the Sami population north of the Polar Circle. Finnmark was, until the Reformation, a missionary district (*terra missionis*) directly subordinated to the archbishop of Nidaros whose claims were recognised by the pope in 1488, following a conflict with the rector of Trondenes in southern Troms who by the way was also the dean of the Nidaros chapter. The proximity to the schismatic Russians, who at times were also called infidels, was frequently used as an argument in supplications to the pope.

That indeed the papacy regarded Scandinavia as one unit is shown by the papal appointments of legates, nuncios and collectors who were often accredited to all the Nordic countries. Consistent with this their authorisation in the North is geographically defined as the kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden and Norway even when they are at the same time given assignments in church provinces and dioceses outside Scandinavia. The congruence of Scandinavian church provinces and kingdoms as well as the close connection between the papal curia and the Scandinavian union monarchs may have contributed to this terminology. Furthermore, the exempt orders in particular were organised in units encompassing all the Nordic kingdoms.

That the Scandinavian churches cooperated on the highest level is shown by the many indulgence privileges issued for churches and church institutions in connection with consultations between the councils of the realms under the union monarchs. The bishops were *ex officio* members of their respective councils and at these meetings the forty-day indulgence that each bishop was entitled to give could be multiplied with the number of bishops present. There were thus good reasons for the parochial clergy and, in particular, the church wardens to secure such benefits from these occasions.

Effects of the loss of population

The late medieval demographic crisis had a decisive influence on the development of the Church with regard to organisation, administration and economy. Like the Crown and nobility the Church was badly affected by the dramatic fall in land-rents and by the marked decline of the most important part of the Church's annual income – tithes – which depended above all on the production of grain. In this connection the shift of emphasis from cereal cultivation to animal husbandry (see Chapter 19) may have created problems for the Church since the income from cattle raising, whether for meat production or dairy farming, was more difficult to assess for tithe collectors, compared to other forms of farming in which products are more easy to quantify. Even so the Church consistently asserted its right to tithes and availed itself of the opportunities which arose to enforce them.

Under the pressure of the difficult economic situation efforts were also made to maintain or revive older fees and contributions to the Church and the clergy, in particular various *iura stolae*, i.e. fees which should have been abolished when tithes were introduced but were now given a new lease of life as an important part of the income of the parochial clergy. In addition to the offerings given in connection with church feasts the fees and contributions in question were payments for the priest's services at weddings, churchings, deaths and funerals, and also so-called voluntary gifts, at times votive offerings.

The situation after the Black Death was extremely critical and made the re-establishment of order and the restoration of church finances an overwhelmingly important task for bishops and other prelates in the next generations. The need for this became even more acute because each episcopal see and some lower benefices as well felt the consequences of the papal provision and taxation policies as they had recently developed, particularly under Johannes XXII's pontificate (see below). On the other hand, there are many indications that the catastrophic decline of the Church's economy was somewhat compensated for by a remarkable amount of donations, not least to central church institutions such as episcopal sees and cathedral chapters.

The measures required to re-establish the financial basis of the Church needed time to take effect but the chronology of the recovery varied from see to see even within Scandinavia. This was a difficult task which appears, however, to have been performed very systematically. The properties and rights of the Church were registered, landed properties were made more compact, and restitutions were sometimes undertaken – all the time with an eye to the old saying that church rights may be forgotten for a time but never lost. The

economic recovery of the Church therefore generally took time even though its finances were put in order sooner than those of the Crown.

Ecclesiastical institutions tried to compensate for the greatly reduced income from rents and tithes by finding new sources of income. One way in which this was done was by acquiring papal privileges giving much coveted indulgences, often attached to churches in the city of Rome or its proximity. The Church also continued its trading and other profitable activities, and bishops and cathedral chapters acquired royal fiefs, both the kind that obliged the enfeoffee to render service and the kind that was security for loans to the king. Both types of fiefs offered considerable economic opportunities for clerical as well as secular enfeoffees.

The demographic effects of the plague epidemics not only created great problems for church economy but they also necessitated a reconstruction of church organisation and administration. The general loss of population greatly reduced the size of congregations and caused a shortage of clerics, leading to incorporations and annexations of parishes. In some cases a parish would completely cease to exist; its churches were abolished and the congregation incorporated into another congregation. However, the most frequent measure seems to have been to combine parishes. At first glance this may appear as an ecclesiastical loss or decline but could in the long run lead to economic and administrative innovations which increased the power of bishops and cathedral chapters. This appears to have been the period in which the large canon parishes (*kannikegield*) in the archdiocese of Trondheim were created. The cathedral chapter had *ius patronatus* (advowson) to these large parishes with several churches.

As *rector ecclesiae* the canon in question was entitled to the income from the parish in return for undertaking the responsibility for the execution of the clerical services (*onera officii*), which were mainly performed by vicars (after the Reformation often called *vicepastores* or *capellani*) who were paid according to an agreement with the rector. It seems that the canon parish gave its proprietor a higher income than he got from his regular prebend. In such instances the need to adapt parochial divisions to changed circumstances coincided with the canons' need to have compensation for decreased land rents. The annexations and incorporations may, however, also have given the parochial clergy greater security. At the same time it seems clear that in sparsely populated districts it became particularly difficult for the clergy to duly attend to the *cura animarum* and for the congregation to discharge its duties to the Church.

There is abundant evidence that the shortage of clerics was great and acute after the Black Death. According to the Norwegian provincial statute of 1351

the lack of prospective clergymen compelled the Church to take into its service simple-minded and ignorant men to guide souls; more experienced priests were ordered to teach these *simpliciores et ignari* their most important clerical duties. At the same time bishops were given an unspecified authority, delegated from the pope, to give dispensations for persons who did not fulfil the requirements of age and birth (*defectus aetatis* and *defectus natalium*). There are, however, indications that the shortage of clerics was overcome more quickly than the economic and administrative consequences of the population loss; in fact it seems to have been more or less remedied in the decades following the Black Death.

It is possible that reduced qualifications caused by the shortage of clerics led to a wider gap between ordinary parochial clergy and members of the cathedral chapters; there are indications that social, economic and educational distinctions became more prominent throughout this period. In all three kingdoms canons were largely recruited from the lower nobility (gentry) and in Denmark and Sweden also from the urban patriciate. Some Danish and Swedish bishops came from the high nobility, a tendency that grew stronger in the period before the Reformation, particularly in Denmark. Nevertheless, in spite of pressure from the nobility, a career in the Church remained a possibility for men with brains and a university education and was supported by the king even when their family background gave them no advantages. Archbishop Børge Gunnensen of Lund and Bishop Jens Andersen Beldenak of Odense are often mentioned as the foremost but also the last princes of the Church who thus made a career in the Danish church. Both had a background in the royal chancery and were appointed at a time when King Hans (1482–1513) had a strong position at home and excellent relations with the curia.

Historians seem to agree that the Church overcame the effects of the late medieval demographic crisis sooner than the State did, emphasising that the Church's administrative system and organisation largely remained intact. The regional division in *parrochiae*, *praepositurae*, *dioceses* and *provinciae* endured, and so did the papacy though the pope temporarily resided in Avignon. There was no question of creating a new system but of restoring an old one. The concept of restitution played a central part, above all in the Church's view of itself, but also for all the people who were required to take part in the reconstruction.

Even demands for new or increased contributions might be disguised as a resumption of old customs. To present new and even revolutionary changes as a return to good old customs, to *mos maiorum*, was a tactic that medieval rulers had borrowed from antiquity. This procedure can be seen clearly in the

measures of the Norwegian archbishop Aslak Bolt (1430–50): he often introduced his demands for fees by declaring that he had found them in an old book but they had wrongly been forgotten. In this way people in the *thing* assemblies were persuaded to adopt the measures, in return obtaining a share in the celebration of requiem masses, particularly the continuous celebration of mass for all Christian souls which the archbishop had founded in his cathedral.

It is a characteristic feature of the ecclesiastical restoration, following from its presentation as restitution, that even in times of crisis it always seems to have long-term goals, taking place *sub specie aeternitatis*. Diocesan visitations seem to have played a part in carrying out the restoration, giving the bishop opportunities to meet and influence the local communities and their leaders, which must have been very important in this context.

Religious life

Although church leaders had to attach decisive importance to the reconstruction and consolidation of the Church, the main purpose of these measures was, according to the medieval view, to create the necessary external framework for the life and practice of the Church and thus enable its leaders to guide the souls committed to their care along the right way. This responsibility was frequently emphasised as the motive for statute legislation in the Norwegian church province (*ius particulare*). Nevertheless, we know little about the inner life of the late medieval Church in the Nordic kingdoms and even less about people's faith, thinking and mentality. The extant religious literature presumably represents mainly the views of the educated part of the clergy. It is also a problem that for a very long time late medieval religiosity and the Church were seen by Protestant church historians as the dark background for 'the bright day of the Gospel' which dawned with the Reformation. This attitude persisted for a long time but has now generally been abandoned. Our understanding of the faith and mentality of people in the late Middle Ages must largely be based on their actions rather than explicit statements of belief.

In the period from the great plague to the mid-fifteenth century donations of land to the Church increased considerably, both as pious gifts and in return for perpetual masses, revealing a religious spirit of generosity as well as fear for the *dies irae* and the life to come. Such religious feelings are also expressed in many of the frescoes from that age which are preserved in Danish churches. It is also clear, particularly in the years around 1400, that people not only worried about their own ultimate fate but were also concerned with the spiritual welfare of

their fellow men. This concern is demonstrated by the common funds created by guilds to pay for requiem masses for their defunct members, and even more clearly by the masses for all Christian souls that are a conspicuous feature of the late Middle Ages. Princes as well as bishops endowed such masses, indicating a sense of universal responsibility that has few parallels before the Halle pietism of the early eighteenth century and the concern for Third World problems in the second half of the twentieth century.

Many pilgrimages to holy places or sacred relics must have been motivated by a genuine sense of sinfulness and guilt and an urge to do penance. Some pilgrimages were presumably imposed as penance while others were in fulfilment of vows made in times of danger. Both could be commuted into money or its equivalents or be performed by a substitute, but many people undertook pilgrimages personally. Motives may to some extent have been mixed, piety may have been combined with a desire for travel and adventure which made the pilgrimage the 'Grand Tour' of one's life. In Scandinavia the shrine of St Olaf in Trondheim was still a particularly important place of pilgrimage and Vadstena was frequently visited, especially after the canonisation of Birgitta. Several other churches and sacred places also attracted pilgrims. The itineraries were often arranged to include many of these; a combination of renowned relics and generous indulgences was, as might be expected, very attractive.

The great, remote and classical goals for pilgrims were mainly an option for society's highest stratum; a journey to the Holy Land or even to Rome was too expensive for people of modest means, even when monastic lodgings provided free shelter and alms from pious Christians provided food. In the late Middle Ages Nordic pilgrims seem to have favoured goals such as Wilsnack, Aachen and, above all, the grave of St James in Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. As a rule pilgrims seem to have put their houses in order and made their wills before leaving, and they generally had a letter of recommendation from their rector or a prelate.

Veneration of the saints and faith in the effectiveness of their relics played an important part in late medieval religious life. More than anything else the presence of relics or miraculous crucifixes or icons drew pilgrims to particular parish churches – a practice which continued long after the Reformation. The largest collections of relics were however to be found in the cathedrals. A striking instance of this is the inventory of relics made by Bishop Hoskuld of Stavanger in Norway in 1517, listing bones of saints whose identity had long been forgotten as well as a number of acquisitions made by the bishop on his recent journey to Rome. The bishop ensured that the bones were preserved

in a fitting manner and decreed that anyone who sold or destroyed them was excommunicate *ipso facto*, while forty days' indulgence was awarded to those who venerated the relics or devoutly visited the cathedral on the feast of the saint in question.

The fashionable saints of the age, such as Anne, Joseph, Christopher and George, gained a foothold in the Nordic countries as well and left their marks in church dedications and personal names. A far more important cult was that of the virgin Mary who was venerated as the gracious mediatrix between the sinner and her Son. The cult of St Olaf was also popular, even outside Scandinavia. His shrine in Nidaros was remembered in the wills of the *Lübecker Bergenfahrer* (the Lübeck merchants who traded with Bergen). The late medieval tendency to ascribe specialised functions to groups of saints and concern for the Nordic union seem to lie behind the conception of the Three Patrons – the three Scandinavian royal saints Erik, Knud and Olaf. A prebend dedicated to them was endowed in 1497 in Nidaros cathedral by a Norwegian noblewoman.

All this evidence suggests that the Church and Christianity figured prominently in the late medieval mind, perhaps more than before or later. The Church accompanied men from cradle to grave, and even though some were angered by its greed and mocked its servants, particularly the itinerant friars, for the discordance of their life and teaching, it was impossible to envisage life, and certainly not death, outside the Church. Its spiritual sword was therefore respected and excommunication was a serious matter both in its spiritual and secular consequences – even if the sword was blunted by the use of *excommunicatio ipso facto* to enforce payment of debts to the pope. There are also indications of a certain distance between the popular religiosity of the masses (and perhaps also the lower clergy) and the faith and theological thinking of bishops and canons, many of whom had a university education. Nevertheless, before the Reformation some prelates combined their humanist education with strong popular piety, for instance in their attitude to relics. Bishop Hoskuld of Stavanger, with his interest in relics, mentioned above, quoted Horace and Virgil in his letters to his colleague in Bergen.

The Nordic churches seem to have avoided religious disturbances and enthusiastic popular movements. Nor does heresy of any importance seem to have occurred, though the pope appointed inquisitors of heresy. One indication of this is that among the questions about church law laid before Henrik Kalteisen, archbishop of Norway (1452–58) and a former *inquisitor hereticarum pravitatis*, there were none about heresy. However, keeping Saturday as a holy day was viewed as Judaism and led to legislation for the Norwegian church

province in the 1430s, and the problem surfaced again just before and after the Reformation.

St Birgitta and her order

St Birgitta is a central personality in the history of the late medieval Church (cf. Chapter 15). She was strongly influenced by her membership of the Swedish high nobility and her spiritual background in the Swedish church but as a religious personality, prophetess, visionary, mystic and critic of the Church she acquired a European importance. Her religious development and her activity in her own country belong to the previous period. In 1349 she had already left for Rome, in part to promote the pope's return to the city of St Peter. She remained in Italy until her death, apart from some journeys, one of them a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. During these years she was an important and highly regarded personality within the Church; she was well connected within the spiritual and secular aristocracy and spoke her mind quite freely as a critic of Church and society. Though she never returned to Sweden she kept contact with her homeland, not least through her daughter Katharina.

Shortly after Birgitta's death in 1373 efforts began to have her canonised. When it finally happened in 1391 it was with the decisive support of Queen Margrethe who had considerable influence in the curia. The queen clearly acted politically with particular regard to Sweden which had recently come under her dominion. But in the words of Y. Brilioth 'political calculation has been combined with the queen's genuine veneration for Birgitta's memory. She may even have seen that the Bridgettine movement was starting to become a spiritually unifying power in the Nordic churches'. Married to the Norwegian king Håkon VI as a child, Margrethe had Birgitta's daughter Märeta as her major-domo and tutor and all her life she kept a close connection with the Bridgettine movement. Eventually it came to take on a much deeper significance than simply a monastic order for St Birgitta's activities and the spiritual currents emanating from her won a wide following among the ecclesiastical and secular aristocracy in all the Nordic kingdoms.

Nevertheless, St Birgitta's lasting influence is above all connected with the order she founded, *Ordo Sancti Salvatoris*. After overcoming several problems and some resistance she lived to see the order and its rule confirmed by the pope in 1370, though with certain reservations. Bridgettine monasteries were established in several countries and in all three Nordic church provinces. From Sweden the movement spread to Denmark (Maribo and Mariager) and Finland (Nådendal). In Norway the most prominent Benedictine abbey,

St Michael's in Bergen (Munkeliv), was reformed as a Bridgettine monastery. The mother foundation in Vadstena became a religious, cultural and at times also political centre not only for Sweden but for all the Nordic kingdoms. It was in high favour with the union monarchs and the aristocracy, growing rich and remaining a power until the Reformation – though hardly as powerful as under the first union monarchs.

Apart from the Bridgettine foundations few new monasteries were established in late medieval Scandinavia. The loss of population and its economic consequences seem to have prevented that; nor do other orders seem to have appealed to the generosity of princes and magnates as they had done in the high Middle Ages. Great foundations of masses and perpetual psalter readings were regularly connected with the cathedrals, and the Norwegian evidence, at least, suggests that episcopal sees and cathedral chapters were, together with local churches, also the main beneficiaries of minor mass foundations and pious gifts. King Erik of Pomerania, though, manifested a certain benevolence towards the strict orders. He tried in vain to get the Carthusians to Denmark but succeeded in persuading the Carmelite friars.

In the fifteenth century there is some evidence of attempts to reform individual orders, for instance by forming congregations such as the Bursfeld congregation within the Benedictine order and the Windesheimer congregation within the Augustinian order. Towards the end of the century the Franciscan Observants had considerable success in Denmark while the less strict Conventuals held their own in Sweden – according to P. G. Lindhardt 'the antagonism shifted to the national level'. The Observants were supported by the Danish royal house where Queen Christine (d. 1521) was a warm adherent. The royal family also demonstrated its attachment to the poor orders by choosing its final resting place in the Franciscan church in Odense.

Other orders

The older monastic foundations lived on and monastic life and contemplative piety were still highly regarded and seen as the way to perfection. The many popular, humorous, and at times slightly frivolous stories about 'monks' may, however, indicate that those representatives of the regular clergy with whom most people came into contact were not as highly regarded as those who spent all their time behind monastery walls. The mendicant orders may have been the main target of such stories but there were also complaints that some members of contemplative orders did not worry overmuch about the *clausura*. The antipathy against the exempt friars shown by Norwegian prelates in the

previous period was clearly expressed in the provincial statutes of the 1430s which forbade itinerant friars and monks to beg outside their own diocese without permission from the local bishop.

Like episcopal sees and cathedral chapters, monasteries offered maintenance for life to the prosperous old or invalids who had property or money to buy it. Such exchanges often substantially increased the capital of the institutions in question. Of similar importance to nunneries were the gifts (dowries) that accompanied the daughters of noblemen and prosperous burghers who were placed in them.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages it became apparent that the Crown intended to utilise the monastic assets for its own purposes. In Denmark, for instance, in the reign of King Hans secular administrators of monasteries were installed on terms that may be interpreted as enfeoffment at the same time as the monasteries were obliged to offer the king hospitality.

The heads of monasteries were of high standing in society and esteemed by their contemporaries. They might take part in public life and in Denmark two of them, the abbot of Sorø and the prior of Antvorskov, were regular members of the council of the realm.

Cooperation between papacy and monarchy

For the whole papal schism the Nordic churches remained in the Roman obedience. During most of the late Middle Ages their relationship with the papacy also interacted closely with their ties to the royal power. Behind this connection was the centralised and detailed papal administration of the Church which developed in the Avignon period, above all during John XXII's pontificate.

In order to acquire the necessary economic support for his policies John introduced a number of taxes and fees, far beyond what had been usual in the high Middle Ages. This was done either by direct taxation of the clergy and church institutions in the form of crusade tithes or by fees demanded from appointees to ecclesiastical offices or for expectancies. In certain cases *annates*, *spolia* and *fructus intercalares* were also imposed. To implement this economic policy a centralised administration of church offices was developed, reserving appointments to all important offices for the pope.

Cooperation with the local secular power, in most cases the prince, was an important condition for the papal taxation of the Church and the sale of indulgences which was introduced later; for one thing the goodwill of the secular power was needed to export money. Whereas the high Middle Ages had seen frequent conflicts between princes and popes the late Middle Ages

are characterised by cooperation to the benefit of both parties. When the pope taxed a country's church and clergy the territorial prince usually got his share.

Princes, however, wanted more than this – above all control over their church and clergy who had become an economic and political power to be reckoned with. Specifically, they wanted to control the bishops who in most countries had a central position in the council of the realm, they needed legally trained clerks for their administration, and preferred to reward these clerks with church benefices. This was sometimes done by awarding the princes rights of presentation to a number of prelatures and canonries in cathedral and collegiate chapters, sometimes by papal accommodation of royal wishes as regards candidates for other offices. Well-trained clerks, *iuris et vitae peritissimi*, who had served in the royal chancery could then, in due course, count upon effective royal support when they presented their candidacy for a vacant episcopal see. The relationship with the curia thus became one of the most important concerns of princely foreign policy.

The cooperation between pope and princes increased the power of both at the expense of local church leaders, in particular the cathedral chapters who lost their most important prerogative, the right to elect bishops. Similarly the archiepiscopal power was reduced. Without the right to confirm the election of suffragans the archbishop was reduced to a *primus inter pares* without any real power over the province's bishops. Nevertheless, as *ex officio* heads of the council of the realm the Nordic archbishops preserved considerable influence, which made it even more important for the king to control their appointment.

For the individual episcopal see the fees (*servitium commune* and *servitia minuta*) which the Apostolic Chamber and the Chamber of the College of Cardinals demanded from a newly appointed bishop were a heavy burden. In appointing by 'provision', the pope, by virtue of his right of reservation, overruled a chapter's right to elect their bishop. The bishop provided then had to give a binding promise (*obligatio*) to pay all his fees, for which purpose all episcopal sees and some lower benefices had been assessed. The new bishop also had to take over possible arrears from his predecessors so that frequent changes of bishop might lead to economic disaster for the see in question.

The conciliar movement

Critical voices were soon raised against the papal provisions and financial policies and in general against the concentration of power in the papal curia. The more loyal critics mainly directed their criticism against what they regarded as

the moral degeneration of the age, in the Church and outside, and wished to remedy this by persuading the pope to return to Rome. St Birgitta belonged to this group of critics, and in this connection it should not be forgotten that the fourteenth century was the age not only of papal fiscalism but also of mysticism. There was, however, no counterpart in Scandinavia to the more fundamental and radical late medieval criticism of the Church's teaching and practice as expressed by John Wyclif and Jan Hus.

The ecclesiastical reform movement, which reached a climax in the first half of the fifteenth century, eventually called for more than moral improvement among the servants of the Church and in the papal curia in particular. Its demands gradually turned into a political programme for the liberation of the national churches from the pope's centralised and absolute authority. This reform movement was mainly an episcopal reaction against the alliance between papal and princely power to the detriment of episcopal authority. Its spokesmen wanted to re-establish *libertas ecclesiae* by restoring the power of archbishops, bishops and cathedral chapters within the Church and by abolishing the pope's economic exploitation of the Church by taxation, provisions, reservations and expectancies.

The attack on papal absolutism and curial fiscalism was at the same time a reaction against the doctrine of the pope's *plenitudo potestatis* which had gained its final form in the Avignon period. As an alternative the reformers, basing their arguments on the early Church, argued for a church headed by a general council, *concilium generale*, which would in their opinion be the most efficient executor of the necessary reforms. Even though manifest ecclesiastical and economic needs were the point of departure for the conciliar movement the question of a council as such became the subject of thorough theological and political ideological discussions and a number of theories about councils were formulated.

Conciliarist tendencies also asserted themselves in Scandinavia, even though the Nordic delegates to the councils of Constance and Basel attended as the king's representatives. In particular the council of Basel (1431–49) was to have considerable influence on the development of the Nordic churches. The council's initiatives against papal power coincided with controversy over the archiepiscopal see of Uppsala (see below), Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson's revolt and the reaction against the strong union monarchy. Thus began a period in which the Nordic churches gained a large measure of independence from king as well as pope – perhaps the most autonomy these churches have ever had. The episcopate, led by outstanding metropolitans, now asserted themselves in national and Nordic politics, apparently inspired in their political thinking by

conciliarist philosophy. One consequence for the inner life of the Church was the resumption of provincial councils. The cathedral chapters again addressed their election decrees to the archbishop who confirmed the election without applying for papal sanction.

However, the regained and increased ecclesiastical freedom turned out to be no more than an interlude (c. 1434–50). Towards the mid-fifteenth century the conciliar period was followed by the Renaissance papacy which in most fields continued along the lines drawn up in the Avignon period. After a few turbulent years, when the recently elected King Christian I (1448–81) tried to conduct a national ecclesiastical policy on a west European pattern, royal co-operation with the curia was resumed. It was further developed in the reign of Christian's son and successor, Hans, and became an important element in Scandinavian political and ecclesiastical history towards the end of the Middle Ages. In this respect the ecclesiastical development took the same course in Scandinavia as in other European kingdoms and principalities, in particular the German principalities. However, neither the Danish–Norwegian kings of the house of Oldenburg nor the various Swedish heads of state came to wield a power over the Church comparable to that of the French and Spanish kings. Throughout this period the Scandinavian heads of state governed their churches *via* Rome. This must have made the Lutheran type of church organisation – with the prince as *summus episcopus*, controlling the Church's possessions – seem attractive to monarchs in financial difficulties but with a considerable wish for power.

The doctrine of papal *plenitudo potestatis*, which was the ideological precondition for papal fiscalism and the policy of provisions, asserted the Church's unity in spiritual as well as administrative matters and the curia's execution of these policies and their effects display many common features all over Europe. Nevertheless, even from one Nordic kingdom to another considerable differences can be found with regard to ecclesiastical traditions, history, geography, economy and politics. For this reason the ecclesiastical–political development calls for separate treatment of the three Scandinavian church provinces.

The province of Lund

As a consequence of the temporary disintegration of the Danish kingdom in the first half of the fourteenth century the archbishopric of Lund came under the control of the Swedish Folkung monarchy and King Magnus Eriksson added 'king of Skåne' to his titles. This was, however, only an interlude as King Valdemar IV (1340–75) soon regained Skåne for the Danish kingdom

(see Chapter 12(d)). He was helped by his good relations and cooperation with the papacy. One of his gains was a share in the income from the papal taxation of his kingdom but above all he gained influence over the Danish church, acquiring the right of presentation to a number of chapter benefices. With the aid of the papal policy of provisions he also managed to develop an episcopate which served as a solid base for the royal power and after his death loyally supported his daughter Margrethe and her son.

Margrethe continued her father's ecclesiastical policies with the same determination and with great success. During the schism she was loyal to Rome and the pope was extremely attentive to her wishes. In the Danish church and among the Danish bishops she found faithful as well as efficient assistants such as the two bishops of Roskilde, Nils Jakobsen Ulfeldt and Peder Jensen Lodehat, and the later Archbishop Peder Lykke. Peder Lodehat in particular has been regarded as the queen's political adviser and confidential friend. The close connection between the monarchy and the see of Roskilde in the days of Valdemar and Margrethe is demonstrated by the fact that the bishop was royal chancellor and several of the canons served in the chancery. Margrethe seems to have felt a genuine devotion for the Bridgettine piety she had met in her tutor Lady Märeta, the daughter of St Birgitta; in particular she appears to have been attracted by the cult of the Virgin Mary. She was a generous donor to ecclesiastical institutions and exerted herself to obtain extensive indulgence privileges for them as well as for herself. Her efforts to promote the canonisation of St Birgitta have already been mentioned and she continued to show great attention to the mother monastery in Vadstena and other Bridgettine institutions.

Margrethe's piety and goodwill towards the Church did not protect it against the land restitutions she carried out for economic and political reasons. All things considered, however, the Danish church seems wholeheartedly to have supported the queen and her policies. In the eyes of churchmen one point in her favour must have been that she, in contrast to many other princes, tried as far as possible to reach her political goals peacefully.

Erik of Pomerania in the main continued Margrethe's ecclesiastical policies but he showed less flexibility and seems to have lacked her diplomatic talents. For instance, in her struggle for Sønderjylland (Southern Jylland) Margrethe used diplomacy whereas King Erik preferred legal enforcement. It may be a symptom of the same personality traits that he preferred the strict monastic orders. He had inherited Margrethe's benevolence to the Bridgettine order, which was shared by his queen Philippa who died and was buried in Vadstena. In her memory the king founded perpetual psalter readings in several cathedrals.

However, Erik acted far more openly as master of the Church than Margrethe had done and his ecclesiastical policy has consequently been described by N. K. Andersen as ‘incipient state church formation’. After the death of Peder Lodehat the king alienated København from the see of Roskilde, making it a royal residential town, but his plan to establish a university there was not put into effect.

The Danish prelates remained loyal to the king and the union through the many difficulties resulting from the struggles with Holstein and the Hanseatic towns and from the Swedish revolt. They proved their loyalty by taking part in the attempt to save the union by creating a personal union based on council constitutionalism. However, when Erik of Pomerania refused to cooperate and left for Gotland the Danish council of the realm took over the government under the leadership of the new archbishop, Hans Laxmand, and invited Christopher of Bavaria, the son of King Erik’s sister, as regent and later as king (1440–8).

Hans Laxmand was now the dominant political personality in Denmark and during his archiepiscopate the see of Lund gained more power than ever in its long history. He was of noble descent from Skåne and had studied in Prague, Erfurt and Cologne where he encountered the conciliar thinking of the age. As dean of Lund he became a member of the council of the realm and on becoming archbishop he showed himself an outstanding representative of conciliarism and secular council constitutionalism. In his days the Danish church truly came to be governed by metropolitan and bishops, in keeping with the programme of the mainstream conciliar movement. As head of the council of the realm he was a strong supporter of the union which he envisaged as a personal union with internal self-government for each kingdom. Christopher’s separate coronations in all three may be seen as an expression of this view of the union.

When Archbishop Hans crowned and anointed Christopher in Ribe cathedral on New Year’s Day 1443 the event was commemorated in a notarial instrument stating that *Johannes archiepiscopus . . . Christophorum in archiregem regni Daniæ consecravit*.² The significance of the term *archirex* (arch-king) and its juxtaposition with *archiepiscopus* (archbishop) has been discussed by historians but it seems clear that the parallel between the head of State and the head of the Church indicates a real dyarchy. This is also clearly expressed in ordinances concerning the episcopal tithes in Jylland and Fyn and a monastic

2 Aa. Andersen (ed.), *Den danske rigsløvgivning 1397–1513* (København, 1989), no. 15, p. 90.

reform which extended the bishop's right of supervision to previously exempt monasteries.

Hans Laxmand's Danish national church, governed by metropolitan and bishops, was not destined to last. The restored papacy regained a decisive influence when the old connection with Scandinavia was re-established after 1449. The curia claimed that the Nordic kingdoms were included in the Vienna concordat of 1448 between the papacy and the *Natio germanica*, which Christian I was at first unwilling to admit. He attempted to continue the national church policy with a far stronger emphasis on the king's power; his model was apparently France after the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges. The pope was, however, unwilling to oblige and the king's use of the German adventurer Marcellus as his adviser on church matters did not improve the relationship. The king's cause did not prosper with the curia until he accepted the Vienna concordat in the late 1450s and Marcellus was out of the picture. The state of affairs from before the Basel council was now re-established.

Thereafter Christian governed the Danish church via Rome with the aid of papal provisions. This was a situation which made close diplomatic contact necessary, in part through quite frequent embassies, in part through the king's regular representative (usually a cardinal) at the apostolic see. When Christian arrived in Rome with an impressive suite on his pilgrimage in 1474 the pope granted him the right of patronage and presentation to sixteen chapter dignities, half of them in Sweden and half in Denmark. This, together with the rights of presentation already acquired by the Crown, gave the king a decisive influence on recruitment to the Danish chapters and the ability to provide for members of his chancery and to have loyal candidates for episcopal sees. His wish that canonries and prelatures should be reserved for noblemen and *doctores* was not gratified, but in practice most *capitulares* were noblemen and these subsequently occupied most of the episcopal sees (cf. above).

Consequently, the Danish episcopate came to be recruited mainly from loyal noble clerks with legal training and administrative experience who, in virtue of their position in the council of the realm, played a central part in contemporary politics. They were loyalists but there are signs that their loyalty to the kingdom was at least as strong as their loyalty to the king. Aristocrats as they were by origin and tradition, their primary allegiance was to the political ideals of council constitutionalism which predominated in that age. There is thus reason to believe that the rules for electing a Danish king, with their emphasis on the council's tasks of censure and restitution at the accession of a new ruler, originated in a clerical environment.

One important consequence of the friendly relations with the curia was the papal permission to establish the university of København, now at last granted to the king. In the reign of King Hans the development continued along the same lines, resulting, particularly in the last decade of his reign, in close and friendly relations with the papacy. According to a Danish historian the pope now ‘consistently acquiesces in breaking down the independence of the Danish church for the benefit of the royal power’, and at the end of Hans’ reign ‘one might almost say that bishops and abbots were merely the king’s servants and the prebends merely the “fiefs” with which he could reward the officials of his chancery’.³

This was a state of affairs that largely remained the same under King Christian II (1513–23). However, he lacked his father’s grasp of politics as the art of the possible, which led to complications even in his relations with the curia and the Danish church. His plans for reform, restricting the secular power of the Church and its alleged secularisation, were in keeping with the catholic reform ideas current in that age but necessarily met with the prelates’ disapproval. Christian’s ecclesiastical legislation therefore was no more than an episode. During the revolt against him the prelates closed ranks around the new regime.

The province of Nidaros (Trondheim)

Norwegian historians have, more insistently than others, emphasised the catastrophic consequences of the late medieval plague epidemics for the Crown and Church (see Chapter 18). As mentioned above, the loss of population and shortage of priests led to extensive annexations and incorporations, and reorganisation and economic restitution remained a high priority for the church leaders in the following period, resulting in impressive cadastres which have in part been preserved. In the last half of the fourteenth century the Church seems to have received many gifts of land, and old *iura stolae* were reintroduced or confirmed.

In 1351 a provincial council gave expression to the Church’s claims to independence and in the last half of the century a new Christian law (concerning the observance of Christianity and the relations between Church and society), largely complying with the Church’s demands, was worked out. The Norwegian episcopacy traditionally represented the strongest opposition against centralised

3 J. Lindbæk, *Pavernes forhold til Danmark under kongerne Kristiern I og Hans* (København, 1907), p. 118.

royal power supported by a loyal secular aristocracy, which was the political ideal of the kings of the Sverre family and which the subsequent Folkung dynasty pursued with energy and considerable success. However, a detente seems to have taken place in the mid-fourteenth century, as indicated by the new Christian law, to be consummated in the reign of Queen Margrethe. By exploiting her good relations with the papacy and with the aid of the royal chapel clergy created by King Håkon V she was able to make the Norwegian episcopate her loyal collaborators; bishops were now to a considerable extent recruited from the chapel clergy. The main reason why the Norwegian prelates supported the queen may have been that they were given considerable freedom of action in their policy of economic and administrative restitution.

The queen's strategies for reinforcing the union were supported by Archbishop Vinald, former *magister capellarum* (head of the chapel clergy). Shortly after his promotion to the metropolitan see in 1387 he was present when Margrethe was elected regent of the Danish kingdom, and it appears that he was also the motive power behind her election in Norway. Likewise, he must have played a leading role when Erik of Pomerania was elected and acclaimed and when he was later crowned Norwegian king by virtue of hereditary right, probably in Oslo in 1392. Another of Margrethe's reliable supporters was Bishop Eystein of Oslo, known for his extensive activities in connection with the economic restitution of the Church and also as head of the embassy that brought Queen Philippa from England.

In the period of freedom under the Basel council the Norwegian archbishop was Aslak Bolt. He belonged to a noble family, served King Erik, and was bishop of Bergen for twenty years (1408–28) before becoming archbishop. As archbishop he carried out an extensive programme of economic and organisational restitution, using his visitations of the archdiocese to negotiate with the people and thus gain new authority for contributions to the Church. Legislation for the Norwegian church province was again issued in provincial councils and the archbishop carried out metropolitan visitations. The chapters regained their right to freely elect bishops and their elections were confirmed by the archbishop. His position as head of the council of the realm made him the leader of the constitutionalist policies which were formulated along the same lines as in the neighbouring kingdoms, sometimes, it seems, meeting with a certain antagonism from the secular magnates who represented the traditional loyalism of the Norwegian aristocracy or who were personally bound to King Erik of Pomerania.

The reign of Christopher of Bavaria was a quiet period for the Norwegian church. In the early years of Christian I's reign, however, conflicts arose, in

part because the royal concept of a national church was reasserted, in part because the pope resumed his provision policies. The clash of interests reached a climax in the conflict over the succession to the see of Nidaros. After Aslak Bolt's death in 1450 the chapter elected its fellow canon Olaf Trondsson, but the king managed to have that election annulled and, in keeping with his wish, the chapter then postulated Marcellus, the bishop of the Icelandic see of Skálholt. The postulation was, however, not confirmed by the pope who provided the learned German Dominican Henrik Kalteisen as archbishop. After having taken office and having met with the king's refusal to recognise him Henrik Kalteisen agreed to resign and left for Rome to submit the case to the pope. The pope refused to comply with the king's wishes and in the meantime Olaf Trondsson governed the archbishopric.

In the early 1450s there seems to have been a tense relationship between the Church and the king's representatives and in 1453 complaints about encroachments against the Church and clergy were made to the pope. This situation must eventually have been felt to be unsatisfactory by both the king and the Norwegian prelates, and both parties were clearly exasperated by the interference of the curia. Eventually the king withdrew his support for Marcellus and made Olaf Trondsson his candidate. He was, however, not provided by the pope until June 1458. Previously, in January the same year, the king had ratified the Tønsberg Concordat of 1277 (Chapter 12(c)) after the council of the realm had agreed to designate the king's son as successor to the throne.

For the rest of the century the Norwegian church was left in peace; in accordance with the Tønsberg Concordat the king abstained from interfering in church affairs. The reason for this may partly have been that Norway was peripheral to the union, partly that the bishops, with their strong position in the council of the realm, were loyal supporters of the king in matters concerning the union. Shortly after his ordination Archbishop Gaute Ivarsson (1475–1510) received Trøndelag as a royal fief and thus combined spiritual and secular authority in the central area of his archdiocese, a state of affairs that continued until the Reformation. In this period the Church enjoyed extensive freedom with regard to its economy, judicial matters and administration. When a vacancy occurred the cathedral chapter's election was regularly annulled by the pope who then, equally regularly, provided the chapter's candidate in return for his promise to pay the stipulated fees. The chapter's right of election thus functioned as right of presentation. Bishops as well as members of the cathedral chapters were regularly recruited from the lesser nobility and the bishops may, in their political and judicial functions as members of the council, be said to represent this relatively influential social group. The bishops'

tax-exempt retainers belonged to the same group, some of them serving in the episcopal residences and some of them attending to the bishops' interests in outlying areas as so-called *setesveiner* (locally situated retainers).

The new century introduced a rougher climate for the Norwegian church. The king used his good relations with the curia to place dependable Danish chancery officials in the archiepiscopal see and the see of Oslo. In his capacity as Norwegian viceroy Prince Christian, the successor to the throne, had Bishop Karl of Hamar arrested, and in spite of the *ipso facto* excommunication incurred by his action he kept the bishop in prison for a long time. This presaged harder times for the Church for, after taking over as king, Christian II infringed its liberty in various ways, in particular its privileges of immunity and jurisdiction. At the same time the Church's engagement in trade, notably the leading role played by the archiepiscopal see in the fish trade, came under attack. The main defender of the Church's rights was Archbishop Erik Valkendorf (1510–22), Christian's former chancellor. He was persecuted and harassed, and after many tribulations died in Rome where he had gone to submit his case to the pope.

In Iceland towards the end of the fourteenth and in the beginning of the fifteenth centuries a number of non-native bishops were appointed by papal provision, most of them regular clerics who had sometimes served as papal penitentiaries. After the middle of the fifteenth century papal provisions seem not to have been used. Candidates for the episcopal dignity were nominated by the clergy and laymen in Iceland, elected by the cathedral chapter of Trondheim and confirmed by the archbishop. In these cases, too, Christian II claimed a royal right to consent and confirm.

In other respects the Icelandic church seems to have continued its vigorous high medieval traditions. Characteristically the bishops, Norwegians or foreigners, appear to have adapted to local customs without attempting any major economic or organisational innovations. The Icelandic bishops were obliged to visit the archiepiscopal see regularly, either in person or by proxy, and the sources show that this duty was complied with until the Reformation. Bishops of the 'tributary lands' in the Western Ocean (Orkney, Føroyar, Iceland and Greenland) served as members of the council of the realm during their visits to Norway.

The province of Uppsala

For much of the late Middle Ages the Swedish church was influenced by St Birgitta and the traditions and spiritual inheritance emanating from her.

Several of the church leaders in the last half of the fourteenth century had personally been influenced by her or had even been in her service, as had the bishop of Linköping, Nicolaus Hermanni, known for his contribution to the Birgitta office (*Rosa rorans*). The years of violent fighting between the Folkung and Mecklenburg dynasties created problems for the Church, but led by the outstanding Archbishop Birger Gregersson (1367–83) it was nevertheless largely able to maintain its position against King Albrecht. In this period the provincial councils played an important role.

Queen Margrethe made considerable efforts to win the allegiance of the Swedish church. She was generous, in particular to Vadstena, but other institutions were also remembered. She generally encountered a pro-union attitude among the Swedish prelates, although her restitutions and some of her ecclesiastical appointments created ill will which was expressed at provincial councils in 1396 and 1412. Erik of Pomerania continued her policies but in a more aggressive manner. Archbishop Johannes Gerechini, whom he had placed in the see of Uppsala, was deposed following serious accusations concerning his private life and his execution of official duties. His successor was a monk from Vadstena but after his demise in 1432 the cathedral chapter elected its dean, Olavus Laurentii, while the king, who had other candidates, refused to recognise the election. The subsequent bitter conflict was in part influenced by the Basel council's measures for securing free ecclesiastical elections, in part by the insurrection initiated by Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson in 1434 (Chapter 19); the result was that Archbishop Olavus remained in office.

In union matters the archiepiscopal election in Uppsala marks the beginning of the reaction against the strong monarchy of the previous period. A state church under the leadership of the union monarch had played a central part in this *regimen regale*. Due to Nordic and international political developments the Swedish church under the leadership of Olavus Laurentii and his outstanding successor, Nicolaus Ragvaldi, regained a freer and stronger position.

The changed state of affairs after the conclusion of the council of Basel and the re-establishment of a strong papacy also had consequences for the Swedish church, and so had the Oldenburg dynasty's attempts to re-establish the Nordic union. Archbishop Jöns Bengtsson Oxenstierna (1448–69), a member of the high nobility, came into conflict with both King Karl Knutsson (1448–57) and Christian I whose candidature to the Swedish crown he had supported. During the long archiepiscopate of Jakob Ulfsson Örnefot (1469–1514) the relationship between the Swedish church and the secular power, i.e. the supervisor of the realm, was in part characterised by cooperation, in part by opposition and struggle. The archbishop and several bishops were undoubtedly pro-unionists

but they were unable to promote these views in the face of regents who had competent spokesmen in the papal curia.

Nevertheless, the second half of the fourteenth and the early fifteenth century seems generally to have been a period of progress for the Church. In 1477 Archbishop Jakob managed to implement the resolution of a provincial council by obtaining the papal bull which led to the foundation of Uppsala university. From the beginning, therefore, this university was an ecclesiastical institution while the king was the motive power behind the foundation of the university of København.

In 1514 Jakob Ulfsson resigned in favour of the young noble prelate Gustaf Trolle. In the face of the supervisor of the realm, the younger Sten Sture, the new archbishop uncompromisingly insisted on the freedom of the Church. In the ensuing open conflict the archbishop's castle was captured and the archbishop made a prisoner. By this the regent was *ipso facto* excommunicate and as *executor* and representative of the secular arm Christian II attacked, pursuing his own plans to re-establish the union. After a couple of unsuccessful attempts he finally gained the upper hand in the winter campaign of 1520. Sten Sture died of his wounds and his adherents were gradually won over by promise of amnesty. Nevertheless, charges of heresy were in the same year brought against many adherents of the Sture party, on account of their conspiracy against the archbishop and their contumacious neglect of the excommunication *ipso facto* incurred by the action against him. The charges were supported by the expert opinion of the ecclesiastical lawyers present. As a consequence a considerable number of prominent Swedish nobles, including two bishops, were executed.

The Stockholm Massacre of 1520 (cf. Chapter 24) marks the end of attempts to re-establish a Nordic union. The abuse of canon law for political purposes and the flagrant violation of the *privilegium canonis* also made it an epoch-making event from an ecclesiastical point of view. As castigator of excommunicates on behalf of the Church Christian II himself infringed many of the legal rules and norms established by the Church or to which it had contributed.

PART VII

*

SCANDINAVIAN UNIONS
(1319–1520)

The political system

HERMAN SCHÜCK

By the end of the thirteenth century more advanced legal systems had been established in all three Scandinavian kingdoms (see Part IV). With the new Law of Jylland Denmark received a law code in 1241, confirmed by the king, which underlined his role as keeper of the law with whom the legislative initiative rested. In 1274 the Norwegian kingdom received its Landlaw, including a new law of succession to the throne, which was complemented by the *Hirðskrá* ('book of the *hirð*') regulating the rights and duties of the royal liegemen. In these laws the king appeared as legislator and the highest judge in the land, predestined by birth to his hereditary office and surrounded by sworn men who owed him special service throughout the entire kingdom. In 1296 the Law of Uppland brought the Swedish realm its first royally confirmed law code. In its 'King's Section' the time-honoured forms of elective kingship were set out and the royal legislation of the past half century inserted.

Years of transition (1319–1380s)

In Norway this phase only involved marginal adjustments of the political and constitutional system.¹ The accession of King Magnus Eriksson in 1319 was in accordance with the current law of succession and the ensuing personal union with Sweden had no formal consequences. The large national assemblies

1 For the following representation, see in general K. Hørbye and M. Venge, *Tiden 1340–1559* (A. E. Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 2:1, København, 1980); K. Hørbye, *Velstands krise og tusind baghold* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, 5, København, 1989); T. Dahlerup, *De fire stænder* (ibid., 6, 1989); A. Wittendorff, *På Guds og Herskabs nåde* (ibid., 7, 1989); H. Bjørkvik, *Folketap og sammenbrudd 1350–1520* (K. Helle (ed.), *Aschehougs Norgeshistorie*, 4, Oslo, 1998); S. Imsen and J. Sandnes, *Avfolkning og union 1319–1448* (K. Mykland (ed.), *Norges historie*, 4, Oslo, 1977); O. J. Benedictow, *Fra rike til provins* (ibid., 5, 1977); J. Rosén, *Tiden före 1718* (*Svensk historia*, 1, Stockholm, 1962); Y. Blomstedt et al. (eds.), *Suomen historia*, 2 (Espoo, 1985); M. Norrback (ed.), *Finlands historia*, 1 (Ekenæs, 1992); E. Juttikala and K. Pirinen, *A History of Finland* (New York, 1990).

(*riksmøter*) which had formed the setting for the great legal reforms of the high Middle Ages were not summoned after 1302. Their place was taken by the royal council of bishops, magnates and royal officials, which from 1319, in the absence of a regent of legal age, acted as the ‘council of the realm’ (cf. Chapter 12(c)).

In Denmark King Erik Klipping’s *håndfæstning* of 1282 (Chapter 12(b)) meant that the rise of royal power was stemmed for a time. An annual national assembly of prelates and magnates, the *Danehof*, was to be the highest legislative and judicial authority. The effect was, in fact, short-lived, but the continued conflict of interest between Crown and aristocracy is attested by the *håndfæstninger* which were issued by the kings Christopher II and Valdemar III at their accessions in 1320 and 1326. The repeated prescription of an annual *Danehof* was a futile measure; large national assemblies were on their way out here as well and the council of the realm had taken over some of their functions. The prevailing concept of society is illustrated by the fact that the accession charters of 1320 and 1326 divide the Danish people into ‘estates’, groups with their own special rights, from the princes to the unprivileged peasantry.

In Sweden the Charter of Liberties issued at the royal election in 1319 (Chapter 12(d)) corresponds to the slightly later Danish charters; assurances against unlawful taxation and judicial trespasses were here given by prelates and magnates in the name of the infant King Magnus. Consequently, the royal and princely councils of the previous decades now took the shape of a ruling council of the realm. This regime is marked by the royal election statute which was later included in the King’s Section of the Landlaw of c. 1350; its extensive royal oath rendered further accession charters by future Swedish kings superfluous. The medieval Swedish constitutional system can now be said to have reached its conclusion: the elective monarchy is asserted, the king is placed under the law, and he receives a council of the realm at his side. The high medieval royal gatherings of prelates and magnates, termed *herredagar* by later historians, survived but had not been institutionalised as national assemblies.

A common feature of the Scandinavian political system which had developed by the mid-fourteenth century was thus the absence of larger political assemblies corresponding to European general estates and English parliaments. The only regular decision-making body alongside the Scandinavian kings was the aristocratic-clerical council of each realm, which in some instances functioned as a tool of the monarch and in others claimed to represent the commonalty of the realm in relations with the monarch.

In Norway the decline of population caused by the Black Death of 1349–50 and the following plague epidemics put overwhelming strains on a

governmental system which was already based on scant personal and material resources. Due to the drastic fall in the incomes of the Crown and landowners the service nobility of the royal *hirð* disintegrated and was replaced by a much less numerous nobility of birth (see Chapter 21). The weakness of the Norwegian secular aristocracy, both in terms of number and resources, is a key to understanding the political developments of the next two centuries.

The Norwegian political system was, however, based on considerable local self-management in both town and country and the local communal apparatus which had previously been developed on the initiative of Crown and Church continued its activities in the late Middle Ages, though with a greater degree of independence than earlier.² Thus, when royal (and episcopal) supervision relaxed, not least because many of the old *hirð* aristocracy were compelled to live off land they themselves cultivated and could no longer devote themselves to the royal service, there was no breakdown of local communal life and social justice. However, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the Crown's initiative and ability to act, internally as well as externally, diminished in the second half of the fourteenth century. The wars against the Mecklenburg regime in Sweden and the Hanseatic towns in the years 1364–76 demonstrated lack of adequate military resources, and contributed further to the decline of Norwegian royal power. By now it was difficult, if not impossible, to maintain an effective central administration in Norway, and against this background the union with Denmark after 1380 may seem a consequential development.

For Denmark and Sweden the Black Death cannot explain the politico-structural changes which occurred from the mid-fourteenth century. In Denmark the central theme is the policy of recovery and restitution which King Valdemar IV pursued from 1340 with broad societal support. Valdemar's monarchy is best reflected by the *landefred* ('peace of the land') which was proclaimed at a *Danehof* in Skanderborg in 1360. This was an agreement between the elected king and the people of the realm, represented by the bishops and nobility. The king promised to observe the law and respect privileges, not to infringe the rights of any individual, and annually to hold a *Danehof*. The people on their part promised the king full support in his rule, which was a marked difference from the one-sided royal pledges of the earlier accession charters.

In spite of its modest practical consequences it has been maintained that the *landefred* of 1360 is one of the epoch-making documents of Danish

2 G. A. Blom, *Norge i union på 1300-tallet*, 2 (Trondheim, 1992), pp. 543–668.

constitutional history.³ As a contract between two formally equal parties it expresses a new vision of society, neither feudal nor theocratic. Its very form, ‘peace of the land’, was common in the disintegrated German realm of the period but ideologically it reveals features of the natural law thinking (Marsilius, Occam) which was current at the court of Emperor Louis of Bavaria where Valdemar had spent time as a young man.

Valdemar exercised his royal power by placing loyal crown servants under strict control in the successively reconquered castles, by recovering the lost royal demesne through his court of inquisition, by obtaining the support of the towns by granting privileges, by stabilising the shaky taxation base and complementing it with extra taxes even from those exempt from ordinary taxation, and by building up a native military power based on the old *leding* obligations.

Valdemar’s death in 1375, with the succession still unresolved, opened the way for strong aristocratic influence on the government of the kingdom. Through a new ‘peace of the land’ (1377) the *Danehof* transferred its competence to the council of the realm which was far better placed to continually watch and control royal power.

What happened to the Swedish political system is closer to the Danish than the Norwegian course of events. That group which in 1319 was denoted as the community of the realm (*communitas regni*) was from the mid-fourteenth century described as ‘bishops and clerics, knights and squires, townsmen, and all the common people (*allmoge*) of Sweden’. When Magnus Eriksson in 1359 wanted to reunite the kingdom after the recent internal struggles, he summoned a meeting reminiscent of the *Danehof* with the purpose of restoring the rights of the Crown and of all social groups.⁴ Just as the Danish *landefred* of 1360 was sealed by princes, bishops, knights and squires, King Magnus declared that his deliberations had been with ‘bishops, knights and other honourable men within and outside the council’. Thus, both at the Swedish meeting of the realm in 1359 and at the Danish meeting in 1360 the negotiating party facing the king were the church leaders and prominent nobles, who could be described as ‘men of the king and the realm’. These men also claimed to represent the clerics, low nobility, burghers and peasants.

The meeting in Stockholm in 1371 where King Albrecht laid down his arms for ‘the men of the realm’ may have been of the same character. The royal

3 A. E. Christensen, *Kongemagt og aristokrati* (København, 1945), pp. 179–229.

4 H. Schück, ‘Sweden’s early parliamentary institutions from the thirteenth century to 1611’, in M. Metcalf (ed.), *The Riksdag: A History of the Swedish Parliament* (Stockholm, 1987), pp. 17–18.

authority was now restricted in a way comparable to the Danish charters of 1320 and 1326: the king transferred castles and *len* ('fiefs', see below) to the council of the realm and through its fixed membership and co-optation of secular members the council became independent of the king.

The background of these measures was the administrative disintegration which had occurred in the last decade of Folkung rule and in connection with the seizure of power by the Mecklenburg dynasty. Only a small portion of the realm, mainly Stockholm, was now under direct royal control; the rest was granted to nobles and lords, in many cases as mortgage *len*. The similarity with Denmark's situation a few decades earlier is striking.

The Kalmar documents of 1397

The years 1387–89 saw dramatic changes which for more than half a century led the three Nordic kingdoms to follow a common path: by 1389 Margrethe, daughter of Valdemar IV, had been acclaimed 'fully powered lady and mistress' of each and every one of them. She immediately used the influence on the Norwegian succession she had obtained following the death of her son Olaf to present her grand-nephew from Pomerania as successor to the throne. He was given the Nordic royal name Erik and without delay was acclaimed king of Norway; there are also indications that he was crowned Norwegian king by hereditary right in 1392.⁵ His elections to the thrones of Denmark and Sweden had to wait until he had attained legal majority in 1396. One year later he was crowned king of all three kingdoms in Kalmar.

The two documents from the Kalmar meeting of 1397, the 'Act of Coronation' and the 'Union Document', are the most debated in Scandinavian medieval research. A consensus achieved in recent years can be expressed as follows:⁶ the Act of Coronation was binding on those 'counsellors and men of Denmark, Sweden and Norway' who issued and sealed it, and thereby for the three kingdoms, and its few points were to all appearances observed. The Union Document is a diplomatically incomplete act of witness to a treaty of government intended to regulate the relations between, on the one hand, the 'councils, and men, and towns' of the three kingdoms, each taken separately, and on the other hand the queen and the king. The document was preserved in the royal archives but it was not until the negotiations with the rebellious Swedes in 1435–6 that the Swedish and Danish counsellors of the

5 E. Haug, 'Erik av Pommerns norske kroning', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 74 (Oslo, 1995), pp. 1–21.

6 E. Lönnroth, 'Unionsdokumenten i Kalmar 1397', *Scandia*, 24 (1958), pp. 32–67; A. E. Christensen, *Kalmarunionen og nordisk politik 1319–1439* (København, 1980), pp. 131–71.

realm maintained that it was part of the union constitution. Consequently, the following survey of the political system of the Kalmar Union will take the Act of Coronation as its point of departure.

The men who issued the Act of Coronation promised to do ‘all that which our right lord and crowned king asks us to do with loyalty and love; and he should do by us all that which he ought to’. As regards ‘castles, strongholds, lands and *len*’ entrusted them by the king or queen they were to conduct themselves, both in the lifetime of the two and after their death, ‘as they have entrusted and shall hereafter entrust us’. Finally the queen was granted discharge from all responsibilities connected with her previous rule which was now formally concluded. The pledge of fidelity given in the Act of Coronation was of an entirely innocent character but this cannot be said of the recognition that the queen and king had the entire right to dispose of the Crown’s castles. A way was here opened for the monarch to appoint castellans on his own initiative for, and even beyond, his own lifetime without any reference to the counsellors.

The Act of Coronation thus points in the direction of a hereditary union monarchy, and in a wider chronological perspective it laid the grounds for a royal conflict with each of the historical constitutions of the three kingdoms. This was at least the case in the already hereditary Norwegian kingdom where it was proclaimed that the succession would descend from Erik. However, the laws to which Erik had sworn at his elections in Denmark and Sweden in 1396 set out the elective principle and offered the monarch no possibility of making decisions beyond his own lifetime even if this had been practised for a long time. Moreover, the Swedish royal oath banned foreigners from holding castles of the kingdom. Obviously, Margrethe, and after her Erik, put greater weight on the Act of Coronation than on the constitutions of the individual kingdoms.

That there was already at the Kalmar meeting a latent conflict between the monarchy and these constitutions can be inferred from the Union Document which set out the following arrangements: common royal election with first right for a son of the deceased king (by which the union of the kingdoms would be perpetuated); internal concord and mutual support against external enemies; observance of each kingdom’s rights ‘concerning castles and strongholds, law and justice’; mutual assistance in case of war; the extension of outlawry in one kingdom to the others; conduct of foreign affairs by the king in agreement with available counsellors from the three kingdoms.

The circumstances surrounding this incomplete treaty between the union monarch and representatives of the kingdoms remain unknown but it is clear

that leading prelates and magnates in Denmark and Sweden – presumably also in Norway – were prepared to establish an eternal union between the kingdoms, based upon common royal elections, foreign policy and defence, and upon each kingdom's enjoyment of its own laws and judicial system. To what extent this involved a *regimen politicum* as opposed to the *regimen regale* of the Act of Coronation will not be discussed here (see Chapter 24).

The political system of the Kalmar Union

The thirty-five years following the Kalmar meeting have been described as 'the Nordic union of the Act of Coronation'.⁷ The union monarchy dominated the three realms beyond the purely local level. As Norwegian regent after her son Olaf's death (1387), Queen Margrethe exercised her duties of government from Denmark where lay the centre of external politics. In Sweden all central governmental apparatus was lacking following the fall of the Mecklenburg regime.

As Margrethe primarily resided in Denmark her Danish chancellor and treasurer came to handle even matters connected with her administration of Norway and Sweden; both should be regarded as royal servants rather than officials of the realm. The royal privy seal with three crowns, normally used for Danish and Swedish affairs, was handled by the Danish chancellor. The Norwegian chancellery, situated in Oslo, continued to exist but with its mandate reduced to one type of business: when perpetrators of manslaughter wanted to avoid outlawry by 'purchase of peace' from the king the necessary documents were issued by the chancellor under the royal seal. From having been the king's most important minister the Norwegian chancellor was thus reduced to a *justitiarius* comparable to the Danish court chancellor (*rettertingskansler*).

In these circumstances the occasional presence of the monarch and his entourage became significant. A single testimony of such a visit is preserved, the instruction given by Queen Margrethe to the young King Erik before he visited Norway in 1405. Dictating the most important measures he was to take she foresaw that he would everywhere be courted by those who wanted privileges and rights confirmed or granted; he was then to choose his words carefully and avoid giving written promises. Erik never returned to Norway.

As the Act of Coronation granted the monarch free disposal of castles and *len* even *post mortem*, it gave him the opportunity of anticipating the

⁷ Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 172–98.

succession without the assent of others. This was done in the letter of obligations (*slottsloven* – ‘vow of castle’) that a castellan had to issue when he received his castle, by naming also the sovereign from whom it should be held after the present monarch’s death. When King Erik’s marriage to Philippa of England threatened to be without issue Bogislaus of Pomerania, Erik’s younger cousin, began to be named in these letters. This, as well as the idea of a united realm, was expressed in its most far-reaching manner when Erik in 1420 redistributed Queen Philippa’s dowry so that it would constitute a single territory in central Sweden instead of being scattered among all three kingdoms: were Erik to die before Bogislaus came of age, the queen would be regent with full authority, and if Bogislaus died, the councils of the three realms would elect a new king from the Pomeranian princely house. There is no indication that the Norwegian and Swedish counsellors consented to this order of succession, nor that it provoked any protests.

The councils of the realms had decisive influence when Margrethe seized power but there is no parallel to this situation later. The Kalmar meeting in 1397 set a pattern insofar as counsellors of all three realms were summoned to the Danish residence of the monarch in order to deal with important and far-reaching matters, particularly regarding foreign policy. In the documents they are not grouped nationally but mentioned in order of rank as in the Act of Coronation. On these occasions the monarch wanted to present the three kingdoms as a united realm.

It was natural for the monarch to summon the Danish council for deliberations, notably on matters concerning the Danish realm. The *Danehof* had had its day; when it was summoned for the very last time in 1413 it was for the purpose of acting as tribunal in King Erik’s suit against his Holstein *len* holders in Schleswig. The instruction for King Erik’s Norwegian journey of 1405 only urged him to summon his counsellors from that part of the kingdom where he dwelt; there was no question of a large meeting of the Norwegian council.

On royal visits to Sweden, as in 1403 and 1413, large Swedish council meetings were summoned but mostly the counsellors gathered in smaller meetings occasioned by, for instance, a royal letter or a visit of Queen Philippa; she functioned as Swedish regent during the king’s lengthy foreign journey in the 1420s. As in Norway, it was those representatives who could be summoned at short notice who came together. The king, again as in Norway, held the bishops, primarily the archbishop, to be highly important. They were easy to reach and had resources for producing written documents; through

the parish priests they were in contact with the common people and the king could generally count on their loyalty. The Swedish Landlaw's provision that the council should have a fixed number of secular members, all native, was not observed; castellans of Danish or German origin appeared at the meetings. Clearly the monarch allowed himself considerable freedom in choosing his counsellors.

The situation of the Danish council was not much different from what it had previously been under strong monarchs but the Norwegian and Swedish councils were doomed to a shadowy existence under the largely absent monarch: there was no central government in his place, and the councils did not control local administration which was now in all three kingdoms based on the system of *len* (sing. and pl.). *Len* (fief) denoted both a fixed administrative district of varying size and the exercise of royal authority for some time within this district by the grantee who in return obtained a share of the royal taxes, fines, etc. he collected. Under Margrethe and Erik the *len* administration was a tool in the hands of the monarch in their effort to control all the kingdoms and obtain as much as possible for the direct use of the Crown. The most advantageous form of administration from this viewpoint – and also the most common one – were *len* held 'by account', whereby income and expenses were reported and the balance was rendered to the monarch. But even *len* 'at farm' existed, for which the holder paid a fixed annual sum. Castle-*len* (*len* surrounding and associated with castles) could be held 'for service', which meant that the castellan received the ordinary income of the *len* in return for maintaining and defending the castle. The monarch's need for funds also led him to mortgage *len* but this happened less frequently than in the past.

In Denmark the large castle-*len* were entrusted to magnates of the native high nobility while many smaller *len* without castles were administered by members of the low nobility or by immigrant foreign noblemen, often without family relations or landed property within the *len*.

The Norwegian *len* administration was to a large extent built on the administrative districts of the high medieval *sýslumenn* (Chapter 12(c)) which continued to exist as smaller *len* (*smålen*). The functions of the high medieval regional treasurers or *féhirðar* were taken over by the castellans of the royal estates or castles of Bergen, Akershus (Oslo), Trondheim and Tønsberghus who, beside the direct control of the surrounding castle-*len*, also had extensive functions as the king's lord lieutenants over larger *hovedlen* ('chief *len*'), made up of subordinate *smålen* together with the castle *len*. These commissions and the strategically important commission as castellan of Bohus castle

with its surrounding *len* (Bohuslän) were generally given 'by account'. As long as castellans and other *len* holders were drawn from the native nobility there was a close connection with the council of the realm but during Erik's reign men of Danish or German origin were placed in Akershus and Bohus. The tendency for Norway to disintegrate administratively into a number of large districts, directly subordinate to the king residing in Denmark, became more pronounced.

The Norwegian 'tributary lands' of the Western Ocean were administered by the castellan of Bergen castle who received the crown revenue from Iceland which was not used to remunerate the one or two *hirðstjórnar* who held the island as *len* (cf. Chapter 12(c)). Icelandic connections with Bergen weakened as the town's staple monopoly of Icelandic trade was broken by English traders who from the beginning of the fifteenth century fetched dried fish directly from Iceland and were later followed by German merchants. The 'Norwegian dominion' was now well on its way towards disintegration.

The Swedish administrative situation following Margrethe's assumption of rule was quite special.⁸ The lords who acclaimed her regent of the Swedish kingdom in 1388, the testamentary executors of the *drots* (grand seneschal) Bo Jonsson, transferred the mortgage *len* they administered – slightly more than half the kingdom and to a large part located in Finland – to the queen and within a few years she was responsible for the entire administrative apparatus. Henceforth the few assignments to hold *len* 'for service' were tied to certain castles and strongholds; most *len* were held 'by account'. Margrethe had a large area in central Sweden assigned to her as her dowry and apparently felt freer there to appoint non-native officials, Danes or Germans. This was a preference which in Erik's reign developed so far that among the large castle-*len* only Åbo and Viborg in Finland were, by the beginning of the 1430s, administered by Swedish nobles.

Communication with the Finnish part of the realm was normally difficult in winter and was considered even less pressing when neither king and court nor an effective council of the realm were to be found in Sweden. As in Norway, the Danish location of the central royal administrative apparatus – chancellery and treasury – worked towards disintegration of the kingdom. This was not the reason why Margrethe had been summoned to overturn a foreign regime. What is more, discontent could breed on Erik's election

8 B. Fritz, *Hus, land och län: Förvaltningen i Sverige 1250–1434*, 1 (Stockholm Studies in History, 16, Stockholm, 1972), pp. 130–55.

promise to 'rule and decree over his realm of Sweden with native and not foreign men'.

When Erik was elected king in Denmark and in Sweden in 1396 Margrethe had the counsellors of the realm agree to the restoration of the rights and property of the Crown and individuals. A royal inquisition court was to judge in each diocese, led by the bishop with noblemen and peasants as assessors. The conduct and result of these inquisitions have not been more closely investigated for Denmark but the results of the Swedish inquisitions are fairly well known.⁹ Here the restorations were extensive, leading periodically to harsh conflicts in which the nobility and high clergy asserted their often common interests in the face of the tribunal. Thus, on the ecclesiastical side the losers were the parish churches, not cathedrals and monasteries; on the secular side lesser freemen, often new immigrants, suffered together with bailiffs and burghers while the native nobility came away more favourably from the proceedings.

At the time of Queen Margrethe's death (1412) discontent was nevertheless widespread in Sweden's leading circles. King Erik therefore found it wise to visit his Swedish kingdom in 1413 and to agree with the council of the realm on a new trial procedure. The provincial *thing* had now ceased to function as a tribunal and the Landlaw gave no clear rules on royal judicial authority or the order of courts. In this situation an inquisition court with two annual sessions was introduced in each diocese, consisting of the bishop, two canons and six freemen, assisted by the provincial lawman. One consequence was that many judgements from the preceding inquisitions were revised.

In some dioceses the inquisition court in 1414 also approved local legislation on the responsibilities of peasants towards landowners where the Landlaw was found to be lacking.¹⁰ The decisions, which were made over the heads of the peasants, probably sharpened the existing practice but served even more to normalise activities in a field where the large landowners wanted to avoid competition for the scarce labour force. Erik's assumption of rule in Sweden thus meant that the Church and nobility were strengthened in their capacity as judges and landowners but not as counsellors and holders of *len*.

In the Finnish part of the Swedish realm Erik was allowed to exercise royal authority already during Margrethe's lifetime. He made a couple of brief visits to Finland and inquisition courts were held by his representatives. In the second

9 J. Rosén, 'Drottning Margaretas svenska räfst', *Scandia*, 20 (1950), pp. 162–246.

10 G. Bjarne Larsson, *Stadgelagstiftning i senmedeltidens Sverige* (Rättshistoriskt bibliotek, 51, Lund, 1994), pp. 62–75, 161–7.

decade of the fifteenth century a *landsrätt* (tribunal of the land) existed in Åbo, administering royal justice in Finland. A later instruction (1435) determined the composition of this tribunal: the bishop with members of the chapter, resident counsellors of the realm as well as lawmen and district court judges, besides a panel of freemen and peasants. What happened in Finland further demonstrates the weakening of the unity of the Swedish and Norwegian kingdoms caused by the lack of autonomous central organs.

The inquisition policy aimed just as much at improving the economic basis of the Crown as at restoring the judicial system. The Crown's traditional income from fines, taxes, landed property and regalian rights was not sufficient to support a court, military power on land and sea, and an active foreign policy. New sources of income had to be found.

The basic income of the Danish crown came from the several *len* administered 'by account' and from the old taxes, proceeds from the large amount of crown land, fines and urban dues. Export duties made a significant contribution, above all the tariff on the Skåne Fairs; from 1429 the Sound Dues on traffic passing through Öresund were added and grew more important as the Skåne Fairs declined. The immunity enjoyed by the Church and nobility applied to the old taxes; extra crown taxes were, however, levied on privileged land, which required negotiations with the landowners, preferably through the council of the realm. There is no indication that the fiscal pressure in Denmark was so great that it was a political problem.

The situation was similar in Norway where the sources of the crown's ordinary income were much the same, though crown land and trade duties played a smaller role. It appears that the council of the realm had little influence on extra taxation which often took the form of an additional tax (*utfareleidang*) for fitting out the *leidang*, even when this was not done, and contributions to royal visits (*gjengjerd*), even when they were not made. In 1424–5 peasants in southern Norway protested to the king against such dues, maintaining that they were not warranted by the good old 'Law of St Olaf'.

Even in this field conditions are better known in Sweden where there was a long tradition of extra taxation applying also to the land of the Church and nobility; the provisions in the Landlaw strictly limiting such taxation and making it dependent on negotiations with each province had little effect. In the Mecklenburg era king and council constantly demanded new exactions and this continued in the early, war-dominated reign of Queen Margrethe. The tendency was now for extra taxes to be collected annually without further decision. When, on her visit to Sweden in 1403, the queen cancelled a particularly heavy war tax, the council of the realm was instructed to find a

replacement which in its turn became a permanent exaction: groups of tax or crown peasants were annually to contribute goods and services, notably for the maintenance of castles.¹¹ Unlike the old, now quite low taxes 'from the time of St Erik' this 'second tax' met with hostile reactions, the more so as the peasants of the Church and nobility did not have to pay it. It caused further discontent when payment had to be made in cash. The only concrete gain of the peasants following the uprisings of 1434–6 was that this tax was reduced by one-third.

Although the Swedish church and nobility escaped the new permanent taxation they were not relieved from extraordinary contributions in connection with the military actions against Holstein and the Hanseatic towns. Armed service was demanded from tax-exempted men time and again – the high cost of equipment eventually becoming a source of complaint – and they frequently had to contribute to the payment of ransoms for people captured by enemies which were legally the king's responsibility.

The Church, on the other hand, was induced to provide 'voluntary' wartime contributions. It should be noted that the monarchy put great weight on securing the loyalty of the three Nordic churches in order to make use of their spiritual and material resources, partly by cooperating with the papacy over the appointment of bishops and other leading clerics (see Chapter 22). By gaining the support of the Church the monarchy could counterbalance the influence of the secular aristocracy and strengthen its authority over the peasantry.

The fall of the strong union monarchy

In broad outline, the union monarchy created by Margrethe and maintained by Erik can be characterised as follows: a central administration located in Denmark; a local administration based on castle-*len*, which as a rule were administered 'by account' by royal appointees; a financial system centred on the monarch with increased taxation and Crown rights strictly asserted at inquisitions. The monarch generally endeavoured to place reliable men in positions of trust, even in episcopal sees, regardless of national or social origin. The three councils of the realms were used as a single committee by

¹¹ E. Lönnroth, *Statsmakt och statsfinans i det medeltida Sverige* (Göteborgs högskolas årsskrift, 1940:3, Göteborg, 1940), pp. 172–90; F. Dovring, *De stående skatterna på jord 1400–1600* (Skrifter utg. av K Humanistiska vetenskapssamfundet i Lund, 49, Lund, 1951), pp. 49–60, 143–9; H. Schück, 'Sex skattebönder av vart härad' – eller i varje gård?, in *Arkivet, historien och rörelsen: Sven Lundkvist 60 år* (Skara, 1987), pp. 81–100.

the monarch with only modest further functions allowed to the Norwegian and Swedish councils. Overall, there was a noticeable tendency towards the disintegration of the Norwegian and Swedish kingdoms within a Danish-dominated union realm in which kingship was in the process of becoming hereditary.

Seen in a contemporary European perspective – as for instance compared with the dynastic unions of Poland–Lithuania, Bohemia–Hungary, and Aragon–Castile – this policy, which succeeded for quite a long time, appears to be unique. Nevertheless, the union monarchy met with a crisis it was not able to overcome. Erik's uncompromising personal rule could not stand the strains of the popular uprisings of the 1430s (Chapter 19) and the constitutional opposition which followed.

The prelude, the risings in the troubled Swedish regions of Dalarna and Bergslagen (1434), both dominated by miners and free-holding peasants, can be seen as a reaction against the administrative system and foreign policy: non-native bailiffs, harsh taxes, hindrances to foreign trade, and a distant king lacking in understanding. The Norwegian peasants' revolt in Østlandet two years later was of a similar nature. The councils of the two realms were forced to deal with the risings but reacted quite differently. While the Norwegian council placed itself in a mediating position between peasants and king and later professed its loyalty to the king as his subjects, the majority of the Swedish council crossed over to the side of the dissidents when confronted with the growing revolt and its leader Engelbrekt. An explanation for the Norwegian course of events can be sought in the traditional loyalty towards the hereditary king and also in the fact that only Østlandet had experienced the rule of foreign bailiffs. The fiscal pressure was harsher and more general in Sweden where there was also a century-long tradition of decisive aristocratic opposition to an expansive royal power. The still undecided controversy over the archiepiscopal see of Uppsala (Chapter 22) was an additional factor. It should, however, be noted that the Finnish part of the realm did not join the uprising until two years had passed.

To the extent that the programme of the Swedish peasant uprising is known, it was, like innumerable late medieval parallels in Europe, conservative: the rebels wanted to return to an imagined era with a protective native king and an absence of taxes and other burdens. The programme of the prelates and nobles was, naturally enough, of a more formal character; it was a protest against transgressions of the Landlaw and royal oath. Gradually, the oath's requirement that 'native' men should sit in the king's council and administer

castles and lands was narrowed to include only 'native-born' men, thus excluding immigrants. The assent of the council of the realm to such appointments was required and the council's basis for representing the realm was broadened by expanding it to include all those who were traditionally called 'men of the realm'.

In his dilemma Erik sought the aid of the councils of his realms, with a fatal result. It soon became clear that the king could not count on the total loyalty of his Danish council, which invoked the Union Document of 1397 as a constitutional guarantee along with the Act of Coronation. At his decisive meeting with the Danish and Swedish councils in Kalmar in August 1436 a coalition emerged between them, emphasising the Swedish royal oath in its current interpretation and thereby the free royal election. Erik rightly protested that 'he had not thus received the realm from Queen Margrethe'. His reaction, which was to ignore the Kalmar agreement, withdraw to peripheral Gotland, and refuse to meet his counsellors, opened the way for the subsequent change in the system.

The three councils were now forced to take responsibility for their realms.¹² A meeting in Kalmar in the summer of 1438, without Norwegian participation, proclaimed a renewal of the union of the three realms for all future time even if they did not have the same king. A year later the Danish council renounced its loyalty to King Erik and summoned his nephew, Christopher of Bavaria, to be supervisor of the realm. In April 1440 he was acclaimed king at the *landsting* in Viborg. He was to rule together with 'the council of the Danish realm'.

Sweden took the next step. In the autumn of 1439 Erik was deposed and the council at the same time began to use a seal of the realm with St Erik as Sweden's patron saint. One year later an improvised royal election meeting determined the conditions for Christopher's assumption as monarch. After having accepted them he was elected and crowned in the traditional manner in September 1441.

The break was more difficult for Norwegians who were traditionally loyal to the king. In August 1440 the Norwegian council and nobility withdrew their allegiance from King Erik, and approached the Swedish council which was in the same predicament. Finally, at a meeting of appointed Norwegian commoners and members of the council in Swedish Lödöse (close to the Norwegian border) in the early summer of 1442, the council was given authority to accept Christopher as king.

¹² Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 233–60.

The heyday of council constitutionalism

During Christopher's brief reign (1440–8) the intentions behind the Union Document of 1397 were put into practice. The constitutional ideal of a personal union of kingdoms governed independently by the councils became more of a reality than in any other period. In Christopher's reign, which coincided with the council of Basel, the Nordic churches gained their greatest degree of independence. The archbishops Hans Laxmand in Lund, Aslak Bolt in Trondheim and Nicolaus Ragvaldi in Uppsala appeared as the leading men of their kingdoms and were able to improve the position of their respective churches (Chapter 22).

The Norwegian council had enjoyed the essentials of power under the leadership of the *drottsete* (grand seneschal) Sigurd Jonsson in the years 1439–42 and kept much of its influence after Christopher's accession. Two permanent departments of the council now took on a clearer form, one for western and northern Norway in Bergen, the other for the rest of the country in Oslo. The council was especially concerned with trade policy and law enforcement. For the first time in the union period members of the council received a general authority from the king to represent him as the supreme judicial authority in the land, corresponding to earlier developments in the neighbouring kingdoms.

The political system of the period is nevertheless most clearly reflected by Swedish developments. The conditions accepted by Christopher at his accession implied that the council of the realm should renew itself, that the castellans' letters of obligations on the demise of the king should be directed to the council, and that the kingdom should have its own financial administration. A committee of four led by the archbishop was appointed to govern when the king was absent from the realm.

In Sweden Christopher also had to approve the revision of the law initiated by the council of the realm.¹³ Legislation added since the mid-fourteenth century and the recent constitutional advances were incorporated in the Landlaw. This meant that legal proceedings were revised: an annual royal court session led by bishop and lawman should now be the highest judicial authority. In the King's Section of the Landlaw 'native' was replaced by 'native-born' and Finland received the same status as the old Swedish law provinces. The king

¹³ Christopher's Landlaw is printed in C. J. Schlyter (ed.), *Samling af Sveriges gamla lagar*, 12 (Lund, 1869). Its genesis and differences from the older Landlaw are treated by Å. Holmbäck and E. Wessén, *Magnus Erikssons landslag* (*Rätthistoriskt bibliotek*, 6, Lund, 1962); cf. Bjarne Larsson, *Stadgelagstiftning*, pp. 127–30.

was to rule the realm 'with the advice of his council in Sweden'. The peasants' obligations to landowners were included in the law. Punishment for crimes in many cases became harsher. Altogether, the revision reflects the changes throughout the preceding century with more difficult economic conditions and increased social polarisation.

Christopher's unexpected death in 1448 heralded the end of the brief aristocratic phase of the union of the three realms, indeed of the union monarchy itself. In Sweden, Karl Knutsson, former supervisor of the realm, was elected king with the royal oath as the only promise demanded of him. However, in the preliminary promise made by Count Christian of Oldenburg before his election as king of Denmark the demands that had been imposed upon King Erik re-emerged: the council of the realm should participate in all important decisions, such as the allocation of *len* and imposition of taxes, and foreigners were not to sit in the council of the realm or hold *len*.

Both newly elected kings strove for the Norwegian crown. The extraordinary situation, whereby neither of them could claim hereditary right, resulted in both of them issuing accession charters. Christian's Norwegian *håndfestning* was based upon his recent Danish one, Karl's was modelled upon Christian's. Both heralded the change from hereditary to elective monarchy in Norway: the king was to be chosen, in the first place from among the royal sons. Other main points were that Norway should enjoy its own law and freedom and the Norwegian church its freedom and privileges; the council of the realm should consent to all important royal decisions concerning Norway; the king was to visit his Norwegian kingdom at least every third year; foreigners should not sit in the council or hold castles and *len* (Christian, though, made exceptions for those who were already in the kingdom or would in the future become Norwegians by marriage); and the kingdom should have its own financial administration. The continuity from the Swedish demands of 1435–41 is apparent.

The race for Norway was won by Christian and the result was sealed by agreements made in Halmstad and Bergen in 1450. When Danish and Swedish council delegations met in Halmstad the Swedes abandoned their king's claim to the Norwegian crown. It was agreed that the union should continue despite the different kings and that the personal union should be restored in the future. In Bergen the Norwegian and Danish councils drew up a treaty of permanent union between the two kingdoms, on equal terms and with each kingdom enjoying its own rights. Norway was now definitely made an elective monarchy with the council as the electoral body; the two councils would, however, in the future conduct common elections in Halmstad.

When Christian was elected Swedish king in 1457 after the deposition of Karl he gave a promise along the same lines. The goal of those lords who called him into the realm was to restore the situation which had existed under Christopher. However, Christian retained the right of appointing castle captains.

The constitutional situation 1450–1513

The death of Christian I in 1481 led to a constitutional re-evaluation. He had taken his promises towards the realms lightly; in Sweden he had not exercised any governmental authority since 1464 and Karl Knutsson, who had twice again become king after his deposition in 1457, had died long ago without any successor. According to the agreements from 1450, the councils of the three realms should hold a common royal election in Halmstad. Who stood closest to the throne was not doubted in any quarter: Hans, Christian's eldest son, had even been acclaimed as his successor in Norway and Sweden in 1458. The issue was in what way the union of the three realms should be restored and on what conditions the new king should assume his rule. In 1483 these were set out in two important constitutional documents, the settlements of Halmstad and Kalmar.

A draft for the Recess of Halmstad had been made in a meeting of the Danish and Swedish councils in the previous year but in the Swedes' absence in Halmstad the settlement came to function as Hans' *håndfæstning* as king of Denmark and Norway.¹⁴ The old programme of council constitutionalism was revived but was now more clearly and precisely drawn. The council of the realm emerges as the representative of each kingdom in relation to the monarch who shall make no important decisions or dispositions without consulting the relevant council and conduct union affairs in cooperation with an annual meeting of representatives of the three councils. Each realm shall be ruled in accordance with its own laws and through its 'good men' – not 'men of low birth' or foreigners. The king shall reside in each kingdom every third year and in his absence from a kingdom a committee of the council shall conduct the government. On the death of the king the respective councils of the realms shall have disposal of the castles. Finally, if the king infringes any subject's rights he violates his oath and his subjects are obliged to instruct him and if necessary prevent him from doing wrong (the so-called 'paragraph of resistance').

¹⁴ G. Carlsson, *Kalmar recess* (Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, Historiskt arkiv, 3, Stockholm, 1955).

It was on these terms, which were intended to complete the development from virtual to personal union, that Hans let himself be elected king of Denmark and Norway. Sweden joined the union by the Recess of Kalmar later in the same year but with the provision, taken from the draft of the Halmstad settlement made in 1482, that the castellans' letters of obligations should not be directed to the king but to the council committee that ruled in his place when he was absent from the kingdom. The terms of Hans' accession to the Swedish kingdom were, however, the subject of prolonged negotiations; it was not until 1497 that he was accepted and crowned.

There was a great gulf between the promises demanded of and sworn to by Christian and Hans and the actual government they exercised. In considering the political system of the period it is nevertheless important to recognise that the principles underlying the incomplete Union Document of 1397 were still the ideals of many members of the ecclesiastical and secular aristocracy, although we cannot know how far they thought that the provisions of the accession charters were enforceable in practice; some were, perhaps, regarded as no more than statements of principles or a basis for negotiation.

In all three kingdoms the council had emerged from the critical 1430s with an altered and strengthened position: it was now truly the council of the realm, not an instrument of the king, with pretensions to represent his subjects, act as his counterpart and exercise sovereign authority when the throne was vacant. King Erik had unintentionally promoted this arrangement by turning to the councils for arbitration and later withdrawing from the tasks of government. Christopher had, in his brief reign, found it wise to accept the situation which had led to his accession.

From now on the relationship between king and council developed differently in the various kingdoms. It was least problematic in Denmark where the king normally dwelt whether he ruled over two or three kingdoms, and where his central governmental apparatus was consequently located. Both in foreign and union politics there was a certain community of interests between him and the Danish high nobility which was strong enough not to fear for its position in Denmark and saw advantages for itself in an expansive royal policy.

The size of the Danish council of the realm culminated in Christian I's days with some forty members, which meant that the relative number of clerical members was reduced and that it could even include royal servants of lower noble birth; nevertheless it was dominated by the great noble families. It was both their weakness and strength that they, too, were the 'king's men' and, as holders of large *len*, his servants. The council of the realm came together, more or less well-attended, a couple of times annually at the king's summons

but its members were normally scattered throughout the realm and it had no leadership or apparatus of its own, while the king had at his disposal a loyal, continually working chancellery which was also the centre of financial administration. He had another advantage in his good relationship with the papacy which enabled him to place suitable persons in episcopal sees and other ecclesiastical offices. The council's influence on foreign policy was particularly limited.

In the conflict between Christian I and the Thott clan (the 'Axelssons', see Chapter 24) the three *landsthings* for Sjælland, Fyn and Jylland were in 1468 each induced to confirm that Christian had kept his oath and observed the rights and privileges of all; in each case this was the result of separate deliberations of nobles together with prelates, of burghers and of peasants. The same division into estates recurred in the summons to a national meeting in Kalundborg later in the same year where the conflict was meant to be settled. In a power struggle which involved members of the council the king thus first turned to an older institution, the *landsting*, and then to one that had hitherto been untried in Denmark, a meeting of the estates of the realm. However, the latter did not become a significant constitutional factor. It was only summoned by the king a few times before 1523, with no sign of any initiative on the part of the estates themselves, and mainly to lend authority to decisions in the name of king and council and concerning the realm and the succession. Occasionally the meeting might assent to extra taxation but in this regard the king normally negotiated with the council of the realm. It was generally more convenient for the king to summon regional meetings of the nobility or town representatives to deal with specific issues than to convene national meetings of estates.

In spite of the restrictions imposed by the Halmstad Recess the monarchy under Hans thus managed to strengthen its position with the help of the governmental apparatus. This is clearly shown by the complaints of the council and nobility after Hans' death in 1513 that their rights had been infringed while the low nobility and burghers had been favoured.

In Norway the accession of new monarchs in 1448 and 1481 were occasions for asserting the authority of the council and the integrity of the realm. Christian I's *håndfestning*, the Bergen Union Treaty of 1450, and the Halmstad Recess marked progress in this direction, but only on parchment; conditions for exploiting the formal rights of the council in practice were obviously lacking. The king and his chancellery were still in Denmark and the Norwegian chancellor only functioned in the judicial tasks mentioned above. The Norwegian high nobility was now reduced to a small handful of families which were not able

to reproduce themselves without inter-Nordic marriages and even then still faced extinction (Chapter 21).

Consequently, the size of the council, which had always varied but before the mid-fifteenth century could amount to more than thirty secular members, was greatly reduced so that there were hardly more than ten after 1500. The permanent ecclesiastical element, consisting of the archbishop, his four Norwegian suffragans and the deans of the two chief royal collegiate chapels in Bergen and Oslo (the latter being also chancellor), became relatively more important and the king could also place foreign favourites in the council, primarily Danes who had married into noble Norwegian families and received castles or other *len*. Larger council meetings were summoned only for extraordinary purposes; normally the council functioned through the two above-mentioned departments in Bergen and Oslo. However, from the mid-fifteenth century, when a *drottsete* was no longer appointed, it was the archbishop of Trondheim who emerged as *de facto* leader of the council.

The Norwegian council was thus split up geographically, socially and nationally to the detriment of its collective authority both internally and externally. Its new role as elective committee was soon neutralised by the acclamation of the young Hans as Christian I's successor in 1458 and it lacked the political power and apparatus to carry out its policies in practice, such as keeping castles and *len* in native hands, limiting independent Hanseatic activity and transgressions in Bergen, and retaining the old colonies to the west and the country's economic links with them. In the latter respect it was not able to counteract the direct trade with Iceland carried out by Englishmen and Germans from the fifteenth century or to retain Iceland and Føroyar as Norwegian *len* under the castle of Bergen. Nor was it able to prevent the pledging of Orkney and Shetland to the Scottish king for the dowry of Christian I's daughter in 1468–9 or recover the islands afterwards.

The one area where the Norwegian council could assert itself was in the administration of justice which it did with royal consent. As the union king could not personally fulfil his legal duty of acting as supreme judge in the land the council was given that function. Its two departments continued the high medieval tradition of controlling judicial activities in their respective regions. Members of the council often appeared at the side of the royal lawmen in the ordinary courts of law, thereby strengthening the authority of the latter. In Hans' reign the two sections of the council also came to constitute a high court (*retterting*) with annual sessions in Bergen and Oslo, drawing lawmen and town councillors into the proceedings.

For Christian I and Hans their Norwegian realm was neither a resource of great importance nor a constant problem. Norway was consequently, for better or worse, ruled in a rather distant manner, nevertheless with the intention of securing as much royal revenue as possible and preventing the council of the realm from exercising centralised government.

The governmental situation in Sweden was more complicated. Karl Knutsson had been elected king in 1448 in competition with the Oxenstierna clan. He never achieved full authority and met with opposition within the council of the realm that rallied around Archbishop Jöns Bengtsson (Oxenstierna). Karl's power was based on the castle-*len* at his direct disposal and his private fortune. The regular Crown income had been reduced by the prevalent aristocratic policy since the end of King Erik's rule. Extra taxation created discontent among the common people with whom Karl, since his time as captain and supervisor of the realm (1436–41), was hardly popular. Intense propaganda could not improve that situation.

Karl's downfall and Christian's accession (1457) did not in principle change the system. Christian's goals were the same as Karl's: to gain control of the castle-*len*, to broaden the taxation base, and to exact extraordinary contributions. The same circle which had deposed Karl therefore had no more difficulty in using the general discontent to get rid of Christian (1464). The following seven years of political chaos seemed to confirm that the Crown's authority and material resources were not sufficient for maintaining a stable government in Sweden. Nevertheless, the nobility and Church in the last quarter of the fifteenth century managed, in an unstable situation, to maintain a fairly effective system of government which could be applied even after the brief Swedish reign of King Hans (1497–1501).

Ever since the latter part of the 1430s the council of the realm had, in periods with no reigning king, appointed one of its members as supervisor of the realm (*riksföreståndare*). Sten Sture obtained this interim appointment after the death of his relative Karl Knutsson (1470) who had by then been acknowledged as king for the third time. In the face of Christian I's renewed and forceful claim to the throne Sten Sture based his position on the castles of Stockholm, Örebro and Åbo which he had taken over after Karl. He strengthened his position as regent by having it acknowledged at a meeting of the realm in 1471 and secured it by victory over Christian in the battle of Brunkeberg in the same year. A few years later the Swedish church extended its protection to the supervisor of the realm as if he were a crowned monarch (1474). The appointment as acting supervisor 'for this time' had thereby *de facto* been transformed into a national office without time limit. It proved to be difficult for the council of the realm

to revoke the appointment of Sten Sture or of his successor, Svante Nilsson. Both claimed that they could only be held to account by a full meeting of the realm, not by the council alone.

However, no one contested that sovereignty rested with the council of the realm. The oath its members swore to the king, according to the King's Section of the Landlaw, was now altered so that it was directed to 'the Swedish realm' and the council itself.¹⁵ For a long time all seven bishops and a much greater number of knights and squires than the twelve prescribed by the Landlaw were members of the council, the great majority of them belonging to a small number of noble families. When a king was lacking the secular element was recruited by cooption.

For practical reasons the council normally met only once or at most a few times a year. Attendance was never complete: 'the Finnish lords' seldom participated, but were informed of decisions and met separately if required; the political centre of the realm lay in the Mälär provinces and Östergötland. At these meetings the great questions of foreign and domestic politics were treated and the council could function as the highest judicial authority. The bishop of Strängnäs functioned as chancellor of the realm, keeping the seal of the realm, preserving its acts and keeping its register. Urgent matters were handled jointly by the archbishop and the supervisor of the realm. The latter for long periods functioned as regent of the kingdom; this was also the way the populace at large perceived 'Lord Sten'. Nevertheless it was the council, not the supervisor alone, which acted in the king's place, issuing statutes, granting urban privileges, concluding agreements with foreign powers, etc.

The meeting of the council could be broadened into a meeting of the realm, and here we are faced with the problem of the genesis of the Swedish *riksdag* (parliament).¹⁶ The meeting of the realm had its legal grounds in the Landlaw's provisions that the king be elected by delegations of 'the commonalty' of the various legal provinces and that negotiations with these provinces were required for the imposition of new taxes. However, the actual reason for broadening a council meeting to a meeting of the nobility in general, or even a meeting including representatives of towns and rural communities, was a political crisis. The revolts of the 1430s drove the council of the realm to summon several of these enlarged meetings, often in connection with some local market or fair in order to win public support. The number of participants

15 S. U. Palme, *Riksföreståndarvalet 1512* (Uppsala universitets årsskrift, 1947:7, Uppsala, 1949), pp. 203–76.

16 E. Lönnroth, *Scandinavians* (Göteborg, 1977), pp. 85–91; Schück, 'Sweden's early parliamentary institutions', pp. 22–32.

varied, as did their social and local affiliations, but it was the council of the realm which made and issued the decisions. The cooperation of other participants took various forms: expressions of opinion and complaints, assent, reception of information, and impositions. Extra taxation could be discussed but not decided. The formula of estates, which was sometimes used, did not reflect actual deliberations within such groups.

Meetings of the realm did not occur under reigning monarchs. Characteristically, they recurred in a unique variant in the turbulent years 1464–71 when, on behalf of the realm, a temporary military host under aristocratic leadership and consisting of low nobility, burghers from Stockholm and the Mälär towns, and the peasantry of Bergslagen and Dalarna, twice recalled Karl Knutsson to the throne.

In this as in other respects the new council regime was linked to its predecessor of the 1430s. The annual council meetings were open to the nobility, to the capital of Stockholm and to others who had affairs there, and were used as a line of communication between government and commonalty. Around the turn of the century certain meetings of greater political consequence took place, to which appointed representatives of towns and rural communities were summoned. On the other hand, the supervisors Sten Sture and Svante Nilsson were inclined to summon meetings like those of the 1460s, dominated by their own supporters and willing to take simple decisions in accordance with their wishes.

In general, it may be said that the predecessors of the Swedish *riksdag* reflect, in various ways, a striving to establish societal authority in times of political unrest and the absence of an executive royal power. It is characteristic of the wide range of forms that some meetings took place on Finnish territory, summoned to Åbo by its bishop and the Finnish council members, and including the nobility as well as representatives of towns and peasantry.¹⁷

Local administration and the upholding of law

The local administration of the three kingdoms after 1450 did not differ in principle from the system prevalent during the preceding three realms' union but its application was different. The same is true of the taxation system about which it can generally be said that the pressure seems to have lightened somewhat, at least in Sweden, which can be explained by the fact that the government no longer had the same strength. The peasant uprisings which

¹⁷ P. Renvall, *Finsk representation i Sveriges riksdag* (Stockholm, 1967), pp. 35–55.

occurred were, in comparison with those of the 1430s, restricted and short-lived, caused by unsatisfactory conditions at the local level.

In Denmark the *len* administration was largely a concern of the king and the native nobility. *Len* could lie 'under *fadeburet*' (the royal 'pantry' or treasury) and thus be administered 'by account', or assigned 'at farm', or, more rarely, 'for service'. The *fadeburslen*, to which the king had better chance of appointing holders without regard to lineage or nationality, were fewer but often of strategic importance, such as København, Krogen (Helsingør), Kalundborg and Vordingborg on Sjælland; Nyborg on Fyn; and Kalø in Jylland. The mortgage *len*, given as surety for the real or fictive debts of the Crown, were a problematic category, tending to become hereditary with limited responsibilities. The action of Christian I against the Thott clan in 1468 was directed against its possession of mortgage *len*.

The direct economic gain from holding *len* varied – *len* 'by account' or 'at farm' could become expensive in years of bad harvest and war – but the political, social and indirect gain was considerable: the *len* holder was the king's representative in military, fiscal and judicial matters. The most advantageous type of *len* was one without castle held 'by account' and connected with the private manor of the holder.

In Norway the *len* system of the Oldenburg monarchs did not differ substantially from that of their predecessors and from that current in contemporary Denmark. For the small number of high nobility it was essential to be able to complement their own possessions with a well situated *smålen* 'at farm'. Local and regional administration was more and more dominated by the castellans of Akershus (Oslo) and Bergenhus – increasingly non-native men – who in their respective parts of the country exercised authority, through their bailiffs (*fogder*), over *hovedlen* ('chief *len*') comprising subordinate *smålen* in addition to the actual castle-*len* itself. The castellan of Akershus became the Crown's leading representative in Norway. Beside the castellans in Oslo and Bergen their colleague at Bohus was, in the long term, able to create quite a strong administrative apparatus.

In Sweden the system established by the aristocracy after King Erik's fall lived on.¹⁸ Among the castle-*len* Stockholm always, and generally also Örebro and Åbo, lay 'under the pantry' (*fataburen*) while others were granted only for service, not seldom for lifetime. A castle-*len* hardly allowed its holder to accumulate a private fortune but it was a position of power, especially when

18 G. T. Westin, 'De s.k. länsregistren från medeltidens slut', *Scandia*, 21 (1951–2), pp. 125–96; I. Hammarström, *Finansförvaltning och varuhandel 1504–1540* (Uppsala, 1956), pp. 9–99.

a monarch was lacking. More financially attractive, both to the regent and others, were the castle-less districts corresponding to the Norwegian *smålen*. The mortgage *len* were few and politically motivated. The regent – king or supervisor of the realm – constantly strove to assign *len*, large and small, to relatives and supporters or to place them under the pantry.

The Finnish part of the realm had a special position. It consisted solely of castle-*len*: two large ones, Åbo and Viborg, and three smaller ones, Kastellholm (Åland), Raseborg and Tavastehus. The distance from the centre of the realm gave the castellan of Viborg the possibility of building up his personal power, as Karl Knutsson did before he was elected king. In the years 1457–83 lords from the Thott clan of Skåne were captains of Viborg. In his settlement with King Hans (1497) Sten Sture reserved all of Finland as his fief; he was succeeded at Viborg by the last man to function there as a counterweight to the regent, Erik Turesson (Bielke). What gave the lord of Viborg a unique position was the fact that he supervised the eastern policies of the kingdom. It was his responsibility to ensure that the peace with the republic of Novgorod, concluded at Nöteborg in 1323, was prolonged regularly – from the 1480s also with the grand duke of Moscow. At the same time he supervised relations with the town of Reval (Tallinn), southern Finland's main trading partner.

Medieval societal organisation was built on justice. Consequently, local communal life can be studied through legislation, judicial organisation and practice, in all of which great changes had taken place in the high Middle Ages. What occurred in the late Middle Ages can be characterised as shifts in the system, reflecting the changing situation in each kingdom.

In Denmark the *landsthings* of the various provinces were still the central judicial authorities. Each was led by a chief justice, the *landsdommer*, a royal servant of noble birth. When administering justice he often made use of other nobles as assessors. No decision taken by king and council was held to have the force of law until it had been accepted and enforced at one of the foremost *landsthings*, those in Lund, Roskilde and Viborg. The *landsthings* could to a certain extent legislate for their respective law provinces, regulating the conditions of the peasants in the interest of the Church and nobility as was done in Sweden by the inquisition of 1414. It was felt necessary to discipline the peasantry and reserve hunting, fishing and the forest for the lords.

The local *herredsting* was led by the district bailiff (*herredsfoged*), normally a peasant who served the *len* holder. As in the other two kingdoms there was no fixed order of appeal from the *herredsting* to the *landsting* and further to the king's court of justice (*retterting*) and to his judgement in the council of the realm. There was, however, a tendency for each social class to seek its

own judicial forum (*værneting*); thus the peasants sought the *herredsting*, the nobles the *landsting* or a higher court.

While the Danish administration of justice was thus dominated by the king, *len* holders and the nobility, it was in Norway carried out, to a considerable extent, within the framework of peasant society. The high Middle Ages had seen an expansion of royal justice but at the same time a conscious use, under royal control, of peasant society's own traditional means of justice. As mentioned above, the late medieval absence of a resident royal power and a centralised system of government meant that the traditions of local self-management continued with increased importance and independence both in and outside the field of justice.

The local *thing* strengthened its position as the focus of official activities in the rural districts, both as a court of justice and a general meeting place which acquired a political role when authorities used it for negotiations with the peasantry or the peasantry presented its grievances. Panels of 'good' or 'judicious' men (ON *dómr*, pl. *dómar*), chosen by the contesting parties, were more frequently employed for settling local disputes. In passing formal judgement they worked together with the royal lawman but they also had a judicial function on their own account. Increasingly the leading men of the localities were authorised by the lawman to act as assessors, so-called *lagrettemenn*, which they did not only in the annual regional *lawthing* where they originally belonged, but also when the lawman passed judgements at the local *thing* or in the first instance in his own court. By taking part in the *dómar* they strengthened the legal authority of these time-honoured panels. Above the local and regional courts the annual *retteting* sessions of the two sections of the council of the realm in Bergen and Oslo functioned as high courts from King Hans' time.

The high medieval *lensmann*, drawn from the ranks of the peasantry to act as the aide of the royal *systemann*, continued to occupy a middle position between the population and the authorities. In the late Middle Ages he assisted the bailiff (*fogd*, pl. *fogder*) of the *len* holder in collecting revenues and administering the law but functioned also as a representative of the local community in the face of royal demands.

Sweden had yet another judicial system. In the new edition of the *Landlaw* the old provincial *thing* was replaced by the annual court of inquisition, led, on behalf of the king, by bishop and lawman; its aristocratic character was unmistakable. The main task of the lawman was now to lead an annual session of each district (*häråd*) court within the legal province, thus giving increased authority and uniformity to the district court. The king's function as supreme

judge was exercised by the council of the realm in periods without a ruling monarch.

Both the lawman and the district court judge (*häradsbövding*) held honorary offices.¹⁹ According to the law the *thing* community was to propose three names from which the king chose one. In fact, the lawman as a rule was selected from the aristocracy of the province, the district court judge from the *härads* nobility, often without real influence on the part of the provincial or local commonalty. However, towards the end of the Middle Ages the supervisor of the realm often used the appointment of district court judges as a resource for the treasury and assigned the office to his supporters and servants. The *thing* sessions were increasingly led by deputies. Consequently, the influence of the jury-like *nämn*d (panel), appointed for each session and chosen among the foremost peasants of the district, increased. The interests of the Crown were represented by the bailiff (*fogde*) present at the proceedings.

Dalarna and Norrland, as well as Finland, present a partly different picture. Here peasant freeholders dominated and the legal districts were often very extensive. The large parishes made up the *thing* districts where the district court judge held sessions. As in Norway the *thing* still functioned in its old role as a forum for the concerns of peasant society, internally and externally. This was particularly the case with the *thing* of Dalarna in Tuna where the supervisors of the realm repeatedly sought a popular mandate.

A century's change in social custom and the conception of law was reflected by the new edition of the Landlaw, the so-called Christopher's Law, imposed in 1442, which nevertheless had little impact on inquisition and district courts. Consequently, the statute legislation of the regimes of Christian I and Sten Sture includes many provisions already found in the new Landlaw.²⁰ As in contemporary Denmark they are to a large extent regulations of the peasants' relations to the land and with landowners, affecting not only the peasants of the Crown, Church and nobility, but also freeholders – in the latter case it was primarily a question of securing the taxation base by preventing the splitting up of peasant land. The Statute of Kalmar, accepted by the council of the realm in 1474, summarises this often local and temporary legislation and functioned as a kind of supplement to the Landlaw. Church and aristocracy thus assumed the right to legislate for peasant society through the council of the realm.

19 S. Claëson, *Häradsbövdingens ämbetet i senmedeltidens och Gustaf Vasas Sverige* (Rättshistoriskt bibliotek, 39, Lund, 1987), pp. 162–205.

20 H. Schück, *Rikets brev och register* (Skrifter utg. av Svenska Riksarkivet, 4, Stockholm, 1976), pp. 392–4; Bjarne Larson, *Stadgelagstiftning*, pp. 86–93.

The new ruling power (1513–23)

Since the 1430s the relationship between regent and council of the realm had been unstable and tense, particularly in connection with shifts of regents. Following the death of King Hans in 1513 the balance between the two parties was disturbed in a way that gave a foretaste of the forces which were to develop in the early Modern Period.

It started in Norway which, since the turn of the century, had been exposed to Swedish attacks and intrigues. In 1506 King Hans sent his son, Prince Christian, to govern the realm on his behalf. Christian went about his task with harshness – in accordance with his father's wishes. Castle captaincies and bishop's sees were filled with loyal non-Norwegians when occasion was found or could be arranged. The council of the realm was entirely pushed aside: it was not summoned and was not allowed to exercise its superior judicial function. Extra taxes were imposed without prior consultation with the peasantry. Norway's lack of potential for constituting an independent realm was expressed drastically in Christian's Danish *håndfæstning* (1513) where it was declared that castles and *len* in Norway should be assigned to 'Norway's and Denmark's nobles and native men' with the motivation that the Norwegian nobility was 'almost extinct'.

The *håndfæstning* of 1513, which Christian deemed wise to accept in an uncertain situation, was similar to that of his father, though it gave the Danish nobility and Church further economic privileges by the renunciation of the Crown's right to fines and extra taxes from their peasants. Throughout his ten-year-long reign Christian II nevertheless worked consistently to strengthen the Crown's grip on administration and finances, in part by using non-noble officials in the chancellery and in the *len*. The burghers, especially in København and Malmö, were favoured in relation to the nobility, Church and foreign trading interests. Uniform legislation for the realm was introduced in the form of a Landlaw (1521) and a Town Law (1522) in which the king's role in the enforcement of law was considerably strengthened at the cost of the Church and nobility, whose right to carry out trade and other urban economic activities was also restricted. The new law codes signalled a thorough change in the system but their practical significance was only to be that of contributing to the fall of their instigator; they were cancelled by the accession charter of his successor.

Parallel developments, though of a more violent nature, occurred in Sweden. When Svante Nilsson died suddenly at New Year 1512 his young son Sten tried to seize the position of supervisor of the realm by taking over

those *len* which were lying under the pantry.²¹ The council of the realm accepted him reluctantly in return for a form of promise that he would continue the established union policies and assign the authority over castles and *len* to a group of four counsellors of the realm (of which he himself was one). In the eyes of people in town and country Sten Sture the Younger, to an even greater degree than his two predecessors, appeared as the regent of the kingdom, drawing them to his side in more or less open opposition to the council of the realm. He maintained that he had not received his office from the council but from ‘the common man’, at the same time avoiding open conflict with the council in which he had adherents.

An open conflict was, however, provoked when in 1514 the aged Archbishop Jakob Ulfsson resigned in favour of the young noble prelate Gustaf Trolle (cf. Chapter 22). In this conflict the supervisor made use of the emerging meeting of the realm. To the assemblies of Arboga and Stockholm in 1517 were summoned not only council and nobility but also the miners and men of Dalarna and townsmen from Stockholm, loyal adherents of the two previous supervisors. At the former meeting an act of accusation against the archbishop was proclaimed; at the latter it was decided to depose him and demolish his castle. On earlier occasions the council had declared itself in agreement with a decision by swearing oaths. The swearing that was now arranged included all participants in the meeting, both noble and non-noble, making the meeting of the realm a tool in the hands of the supervisor and the participating counsellors mere hostages.

The regime of Sten Sture the Younger ended abruptly with his death in the winter of 1520. The victorious Christian II apparently seized power on the same conditions as his father had done in 1497, namely the Kalmar Recess of 1483. But when Stockholm capitulated he declared that the castellans’ letter of obligations should be directed to his son after him and that the queen was next in line – the same method of undermining the elective monarchy that had been applied a hundred years earlier. In connection with his coronation Christian, who had already been acclaimed heir to the throne in 1499, extorted a declaration from the council of the realm that he succeeded by hereditary right. The ensuing trial of the Stures’ supporters and the Stockholm Massacre, followed by further executions and the appointment of a conciliar government of the king’s Danish and German associates, seemed to imply that Sweden would be reduced to a position like Norway’s in the re-established union realm.

21 G. T. Westin, *Riksföreståndaren och makten* (Skrifter utg. av Vetenskapssocieteten i Lund, 52, Lund, 1957).

Can one then speak of a late medieval Nordic 'political system'? Undoubtedly there were certain traits in the political, social and legal structure which from the high Middle Ages were common to all three Scandinavian kingdoms and distinguished them from continental European kingdoms and principalities with their more pronounced feudal relationships of dependency. The most conspicuous common features of organisation were the *len* system of local administration with royal castles as its nodal points, an aristocratic-ecclesiastical council of the realm at the side of the monarch with pretensions to represent the commonalty of the realm, and the system of *things* of higher and lower order.

The half-century-long union monarchy under Queen Margrethe and King Erik brought with it strong unifying tendencies, with a dominant position for the Danish kingdom. However, in a broad perspective, 'each realm retained its law and its rights', to use the words of the Union Document of 1397, and after the period of council constitutionalism in the 1440s the development of political structure tended to follow a different course in each kingdom.

In the mid-fifteenth century the union monarchy broke down and was succeeded partly by a Danish–Norwegian monarchy, partly by a Swedish one under various regents: sometimes a native king, at others a union king, but for the longest periods a supervisor of the realm in cooperation with the council of the realm. In the final phase of the Middle Ages the three kingdoms further developed their political systems at different levels, centrally and locally.

In very broad outline it can be said that in Denmark a balance between king and aristocracy existed while the peasants and burghers lacked influence. The Swedish situation was marked by the rivalry of aristocratic factions which sought the support of the Church, the burghers of the capital, and certain peasant communities. In Norway what remained of a national political system functioned mostly on the local level, now dominated by the higher stratum of peasantry.

Inter-Scandinavian relations

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The late medieval unions of two or all three Scandinavian kingdoms brought closer together areas which in spite of their similarities were far from homogenous in language, culture, social structure or living conditions. Denmark (including Skåne, Halland and Blekinge), Sweden (with Finland) and Norway (with the tributary islands of Føroyar, Iceland and Greenland) were each, like other medieval kingdoms and principalities, ruled by a prince in a kind of symbiosis with a secular and ecclesiastical aristocracy. Because of their offices and their participation in the councils of the realms and other representative assemblies Scandinavian prelates and magnates were, like their European counterparts, at the same time both assistants of the royal power and representatives of the estates and people of their respective kingdoms. Their relations to the monarchy and their governmental influence varied but in all three kingdoms they formed throughout the late Middle Ages a mainstay of the political system on which the unions were based.¹

This does not mean that the unions were a consequence of an aristocratic sense of Scandinavian community; they were brought about by monarchic and princely relations. However, in the long run they led to an aristocratic Scandinavianism which in the latter part of the union period came to influence political developments in a decisive way.² Connections were particularly close between the Danish and Swedish nobles who held land near the frontier of their kingdoms. Already in the 1350s it is possible to identify Swedish magnates who had acquired landed property in Skåne and Halland. The largest collector of such property in the early union period, Abraham Brodersen of the Baad family from Halland (cf. Chapter 21), owned estates on both sides of

1 About kingship and aristocracy and the unions in general, see A. E. Christensen, *Kongemagt og aristokrati: Epoker i middelalderlig dansk statsopfattelse indtil unionstiden* (København, 1945, repr. 1968); E. Albrechtsen, *Fællesskabet bliver til 1380–1536 (Danmark-Norges historie, 1, Oslo, 1997).*

2 H. Bruun, 'Adelsskandinavismen: En skizze', *Nordisk tidsskrift* (1951), pp. 210–27; A. E. Christensen, *Kalmarunionen og nordisk politik 1319–1439* (København, 1980).

the Danish–Swedish border, 55 per cent on the Swedish side and 45 per cent on Danish soil. In Norwegian Bohuslän there were no similar contacts across the borders with Denmark and Sweden; the Scandinavian relations of the Norwegian nobility developed more on a national level and were above all marked by the immigration of Swedish and later also of Danish noblemen who married into Norwegian families whose male lines became extinct.³

In the fourteenth century there was also an extensive immigration of German noblemen, first to Denmark where Holsteiners, followed by a smaller number of Mecklenburgers, gained a strong influence, and then to Sweden after the Mecklenburgers had superseded the Folkung dynasty. For a short time the Germans seemed to be dominant in both kingdoms but in the long run the effects of their immigration were not so significant because many returned to their German territories and the rest were quickly integrated into the native aristocracies.⁴

Inter-Scandinavian relations in the late Middle Ages were strongly influenced by geopolitical conditions as they had been already in the latter part of the high Middle Ages (cf. Chapter 12(e)). The growing importance of the towns and castles of the Sound region was particularly significant as trade and shipping between the Baltic and the North Sea increased through the Skåne Fairs and with Swedish exports by way of the ports of Skåne. Denmark's central position at the entrance to the Baltic and the Skåne Fairs involved the German Hansa, especially the Wendish towns under Lübeck's leadership, deeply in Scandinavian politics. North German princes (particularly the Holsteiners and Mecklenburgers), the Teutonic Order and the Netherlanders were also important players in the political game centred on Skåne and the Sound region, though the chief goal of the counts of Holstein was to control the duchy of Schleswig which was part of the Danish kingdom. Further away the Swedish exports of iron and copper through Stockholm and the Norwegian fish exports through Bergen attracted Hanseatic and other foreign interests. The development of inter-Scandinavian relations and the fate of the unions can only be understood in this wider geopolitical perspective.

In Scandinavian historical research the late medieval unions have traditionally been regarded from national points of view and particular stress has been

3 H. Bruun, 'Abraham Brodersen' *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 11:3 (København, 1950), pp. 48–136.

4 Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 36–9, 91–95; D. Kattinger, '“Jag lönthe the swenska mz sorg thz the mik hente aff mäkilborgh”': Aspekter der Fremd-Herrschaft am Beispiel Albrechts von Mecklenburg in Schweden (1361–1389)', in I. Erfen and K.-H. Spiess (eds.), *Fremdheit und Reisen im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1997), pp. 93–117; E. Albrechtsen, *Herredømmet over Sønderjylland 1375–1404: Studier over hertugdømmets lensforhold og indre opbygning på dronning Margrethes tid* (København, 1981), pp. 123–78, 292–318.

put on the conflict between nation and union, above all the Swedish rising against King Erik of Pomerania and the subsequent Swedish efforts to break away from the rule of Danish union kings. Modern research has, however, realised the high priority given to union policy by leading political figures at that time, both regents and counsellors of the realms.⁵

The direction of research changed in 1934 when the Swedish scholar Erik Lönnroth presented a fresh assessment of the Kalmar union in his doctoral dissertation, calling attention to the recurring conflicts between a monarchic and an aristocratic union policy. The former worked towards hereditary kingship within a centralised state while the latter maintained the right of the aristocracy to influence government through royal elections, by participation in the councils of the realms, and by trying to monopolise the holding of castles and *len*. In accordance with contemporary political theory Lönnroth labelled the two policies *regimen regale* and *regimen politicum*, respectively; they were reflected in the Kalmar documents of 1397 – the Act of Coronation and the Union Document (cf. Chapter 23). The aristocratic principle of government was most firmly anchored in the pre-union policy of the Swedish council of the realm. It was resuscitated in the rebellion against the strong union monarchy in the 1430s and put its stamp on the reign of Christopher of Bavaria. Later attempts to restrict royal power through *håndfæstninger* in the form of accession charters are also remarkable.⁶

Lönnroth's work created renewed interest in union relations. Research since then has included financial and social studies, and in the political sphere has led to a better understanding of the power struggle between kings and aristocrats by emphasising the role of circles of persons and noble groups who pursued their own interests in relation to each other and the monarchy. In practice matters were probably never as simple as the two principles of government may seem to indicate. The monarchs did not normally face a united front of magnates and prelates who worked to carry the principles of *regimen politicum* to their logical conclusion. If a Nordic counsellor wanted power and influence he had to make himself available or, better still, indispensable in the policy which king and council might agree to pursue in a given situation. The king, on his part, could play on whatever differences and groupings there were in

5 P. Enemark, *Fra Kalmarbrev til Stockholms blodbad: Den nordiske trestatsunions epoke 1397–1521* (Tønder, 1979); J. E. Olesen, *Rigsråd – Kongemagt – Union: Studier over det danske rigsråd og den nordiske kongemagts politik 1439–1449* (Skrifter udgivet af Jysk Selskab for Historie, 36, Aarhus 1980); J. E. Olesen, *Unionskrige og Stændersamfund: Bidrag til Nordens historie i Kristian I's regeringstid 1450–1481* (ibid., 40, 1983); L.-O. Larsson, *Kalmarunionens tid: Från drottning Margareta til Kristian II* (Falun, 1997).

6 E. Lönnroth, *Sverige och Kalmarunionen 1397–1457* (Göteborg, 1934; repr. 1969).

the councils and among the aristocracy, and his favour could of course lead to powerful positions and profitable *len*. Many a counsellor tried to the best of his ability to adapt to changing political constellations until he was powerful enough to put a price on his support. It was a weakness of the aristocracy that it lacked regular procedures for conducting mutual negotiations and formulating a common policy.⁷

Against the backdrop of the late medieval political system described above (Chapter 23) the basic theme of the following presentation of inter-Scandinavian political relations in the union period will be the struggle over territories, castles and politico-financial matters involving princes and pretenders of the same or competing families, supervisors and counsellors of the realms. In these conflicts the domination of the Skåne provinces and the Sound region stands out as a constantly recurring issue which also attracted the interest of foreign powers. Control of the strategically placed island of Gotland also became an important matter of dispute.

The Swedish–Norwegian personal union 1319–55 and the struggle for Skåne

Scandinavian union history starts in the year 1319 when a Swedish–Norwegian personal union was established as an unplanned consequence of the three-year-old Magnus Eriksson's accession to the thrones of Norway and Sweden. Before he was elected in Sweden and acclaimed hereditary king of Norway an agreement between the Norwegian council of the realm and Swedish delegates was reached in Oslo by which the joint concerns of the two kingdoms during Magnus' minority were kept to a minimum (Chapter 8(d)).⁸

The Swedish regency for Magnus was headed by the *drots* (grand seneschal) Mats Kettilmundsson while the Varberg circle around the king's mother Duchess Ingebjørg, including her later husband Knud Porse, continued to pursue Duke Erik's policy of establishing a south Scandinavian dominion with the acquisition of Skåne as their chief aim. Part of this policy was the consequential alliance concluded with the duke of Mecklenburg in 1321 by which King

7 Olesen, *Rigsråd*; Olesen, *Unionskrige*; Enemark, *Kriseår 1448–1451: En epoke i nordisk unionshistorie* (København, 1981); P. Enemark, 'Motiver for nordisk aristokratisk unionspolitik: Overvejelser omkring kildegrundlag og tilgangsvinkler i unionsforskningen', in P. Ingesman and J. V. Jensen (eds.), *Danmark i senmiddelalderen* (Aarhus, 1994), pp. 166–81.

8 For the following, see G. A. Blom, *Norge i union på 1300-tallet*, 1–2 (Oslo 1992); A. E. Christensen, 'De nordiske kongeskifter 1319', in *Danmark, Norden og Østersøen: Udvalgte afhandlinger* (København, 1976), pp. 52–64.

Magnus' sister, Eufemia, was to marry the duke's nephew, the young Prince Albrecht; this was the arrangement that started the strong Mecklenburg influence in fourteenth-century Swedish politics. In 1321 secret arrangements were made for an attack on Skåne to be implemented under Knud Porse's leadership in 1322, but it came to naught as Swedish and Norwegian support was withheld.

Opposition to the duchess and her foreign supporters had by now welded together the various groups of Swedish counsellors of the realm whose number had at the same time been expanded. At a meeting in Skara in 1322 the duchess was placed under the control of the council and a new *drots*, Knut Jonsson, was appointed for the rest of the minority. In Norway the regency was formally in the hands of the council of the realm with an unclear position for the duchess who took little interest in Norwegian affairs. The counsellors were strongly against using Norwegian revenues to finance the Skåne policy of the Varberg circle and the attack on Skåne in 1322 provoked a Norwegian reaction on the Swedish pattern. At a large meeting of prelates and royal liegemen in Oslo in 1323 Erling Vidkunsson was elected leader of the government, which he headed for the rest of King Magnus' minority with the title of *drottsete* (corresponding to Swedish *drots* and Danish *drost*) in close cooperation with the council. After this the duchess had no influence on Norwegian politics.

After King Erik Menved's death in 1319 there was no one to succeed him on the Danish throne but his brother Christopher who was elected king in 1320 in return for the first Danish *håndfæstning* in the form of an accession charter. Like the Swedish Charter of Liberties from 1319 (see Chapter 8(d)) Christopher's *håndfæstning* erected barriers against arbitrary royal power. In its conflict with Duchess Ingebjørg and her supporters the Swedish council sought cooperation with Christopher to preserve peace between the two kingdoms whereas the Varberg circle had contact with opposition circles in Denmark, particularly in Skåne.

In 1326 Count Gerhard of Holstein (Rendsburg) allied himself with a Danish coalition and drove Christopher into exile, installing the under-age Duke Valdemar of Schleswig as king in his place. However, Christopher returned in 1329 with the support of the other Holstein count, his half-brother Johan (Plön). Johan was remunerated with eastern Denmark in the form of mortgage *len*, including Skåne, while Count Gerhard was the ruling mortgagee in northern Jylland. This was the situation when Magnus Eriksson came of age in 1331–2 and took over the government of both his kingdoms.

The personal union of Norway and Sweden continued, but without any formal treaty and with the king as the only connecting link. By now dissatisfaction with Count Johan's German bailiffs had grown strong enough for the estates of Skåne to invite Magnus to rule Skåne in 1332 (Chapter 8(d)). His following acclamation at the *landsting* of Lund created a new personal union of a more intimate character than the Swedish–Norwegian connection. The subsequent agreement with the Holstein counts formalised King Magnus' position as mortgagee of Skåne with Blekinge in place of Count Johan in return for a payment of 34,000 marks silver, but it also stipulated that the territories could be redeemed by the counts, Duke Valdemar of Schleswig, or anyone who possessed the right of redemption, i.e. the rightful king of Denmark.

In 1340 the estates of Skåne bound themselves more firmly to the Swedish king in a permanent personal union but the threat of redemption increased when Valdemar IV was elected Danish king in the same year and took over the government of Jylland with Fyn and Sjælland with Lolland, Falster and Møn. Magnus' chief political aim was now to have Valdemar cede Skåne and the neighbouring Danish provinces (Blekinge, South Halland, Lister, the Isle of Hven) to him, in which he finally succeeded, after protracted negotiations, in 1343. The clergy, and undoubtedly also the nobility, of Sweden and Skåne issued a declaration to the effect that Sweden and Skåne were so legally and inseparably bound together that they should be regarded as one kingdom which ought to be ruled by one king. They also promised to keep Sweden and the Skåne provinces united and later declared that they would make Magnus' eldest son, Erik, king of Sweden and Skåne and the adjoining provinces. Thus a movement from union to incorporation of Skåne into the Swedish kingdom was delineated.⁹

Earlier in the same year an agreement had been made between King Magnus and the Norwegian council whereby the council acclaimed Magnus' younger son Håkon king of Norway to succeed his father when he came of age. The implication was that his elder brother Erik was to be future king of Sweden and Skåne as was confirmed by his subsequent election. The acclamation of Håkon, confirmed by a meeting of representatives of towns and rural districts in 1344, was a breach of the current Norwegian law of succession by which the eldest legitimate son of the previous king was to be his successor. Formally, the principle of hereditary succession was maintained but in fact the council in 1343 took the first step on the road that would, in 1450, lead finally to an elective

9 Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 52–61.

monarchy after the pattern of the neighbouring kingdoms. Dissolution of the Swedish–Norwegian personal union, which was effected when Håkon VI came of age in 1355, was obviously in the interest of both King Magnus and the Norwegian council. The union had been established by dynastic coincidence and there was neither in Norway nor in Sweden a strong desire to establish a permanent and more extensive union. In Norway one can also from the later years of King Håkon V's reign perceive a tendency towards isolationism in Scandinavian politics, dictated by fear of being overrun and dominated by stronger political players in the neighbouring kingdoms (Chapter 8(e)).

The Danish scholar Aksel E. Christensen has drawn attention to what may in 1343 be regarded as the first sign of Nordic cooperation, namely an aristocratic arbitration committee which was apparently instituted on the initiative of Danish and Swedish magnates with the purpose of controlling their kings and maintaining peace between their kingdoms. The committee was not needed then as the kings made a final peace in that year. Nevertheless, the idea was kept alive in the following ten to fifteen years during which there are indications that the arbitration committee functioned occasionally.¹⁰

Recovery of Skåne was constantly on King Valdemar's mind. In 1350 he made an amicable settlement with Duke Albrecht of Mecklenburg by which Albrecht undertook to assist him in finally uniting his entire kingdom. This agreement marked a decisive change of the power balance in the Baltic region. Mecklenburg replaced Holstein as the leading north German participant in Scandinavian politics and influenced the situation in both Denmark and Sweden. The rapprochement between Valdemar and Albrecht did not, however, last long as the latter soon again allied with his Swedish brother-in-law, King Magnus.

Political unrest and warfare 1355–75

When King Håkon VI came of age in 1355 it did not mean that he took over the government of the whole of Norway. His father had reserved for himself Hålogaland in the north and the tributary islands to the west, and he also controlled most of Bohuslän and the adjoining Borgarsysle to the north in exchange for his queen's morning gift. He retained his title of king of Norway and worked well together with his younger son, which he needed to do in face of the situation in Sweden. Here, his elder son Erik became the rallying point of the growing opposition to Magnus within the Swedish upper classes. After

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–8.

Erik's revolt in 1356, supported by his uncle Duke Albrecht of Mecklenburg, Magnus had to accept his son's rule over most of Sweden, including Skåne (Chapter 8(d)). His own remaining part of Sweden formed, together with his Norwegian territories, a continuous Swedish–Norwegian frontier kingdom similar to the one ruled by Duke Erik earlier in the century. The partition of the Swedish kingdom was dictated by the Swedish aristocracy with the intention of making the council the controlling power in the whole realm; to that end the counsellors secured for themselves important rights in the administration of the castles of the kingdom.

In Denmark King Valdemar at first refused to commit himself when civil war broke out in Sweden but when hostilities were reopened in 1358 he took the side of Magnus and Håkon against Erik, as it was the latter who now controlled Skåne. This was the background for the betrothal of Valdemar's daughter Margrethe to King Håkon in 1359, followed by an attack on Skåne by Valdemar. Erik's death later in the same year raised Magnus' hopes of regaining the entire Swedish kingdom and caused him to turn against Valdemar in alliance with Duke Albrecht who was also working to gain control of Skåne. However, the Swedish council did not intend to let Magnus regain full royal power, demanding to be heard on all matters of importance.

It was not in the power of Magnus and the Swedish council to prevent Valdemar from conquering Skåne, Blekinge and South Halland in 1360 and taking possession of Gotland with Visby in the following year. The Danish expansion brought Sweden and the Wendish Hansa towns together, joined by Mecklenburg and Holstein, but Magnus' and Håkon's continued war efforts against Valdemar were not very effective. Magnus' position in Sweden had been seriously weakened by the loss of Skåne and Gotland which eventually led to his deposition by the council in 1362 and the election of Håkon as Swedish king in his place. Father and son were, however, soon reconciled and found it better to recognise the loss of Skåne and re-establish the alliance with Valdemar than to continue the connection with Mecklenburg preferred by the Swedish magnates. The broken engagement between King Håkon and Margrethe was repaired (a marriage had in the meantime been considered between Håkon and a sister of one of the Holstein counts) and in 1363 their wedding was celebrated in København. Thus was laid the dynastic foundation for the later Kalmar union.¹¹

¹¹ The political relations are treated by Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, and Blom, *Norge i union*, 2. For the invasion of Gotland, see C. Tortzen, *Gotland 1361: Forudsætningerne, overleveringen* (København, 1961).

King Valdemar's marriage policy was not motivated by any thought of establishing Nordic unity. If anyone at that time entertained such a notion it would have been Duke Albrecht of Mecklenburg whose elder son had in 1362 married Valdemar's elder daughter, Ingeborg. This, however, did not improve Danish relations with Mecklenburg and Duke Albrecht attached himself to the Swedish opposition magnates. The latter were infuriated by the marriage of Håkon and Margrethe and now worked towards making Albrecht's younger son and namesake king of Sweden. The Mecklenburgers and the rebellious Swedish counsellors rapidly made themselves masters of the greater part of Sweden; Magnus and Håkon were deposed and Albrecht the Younger elected king in 1363 (Chapter 8(d)).

In the following years the Swedish political scene was dominated by continued strife and unrest which threatened the kingdom with partition. The kings Magnus and Håkon continued the fight but after their defeat in 1365, when Magnus was taken prisoner, Håkon had to withdraw to his Norwegian kingdom. However, he kept his father's west Swedish territories. King Valdemar at first adopted a policy of wait-and-see towards the fighting in Sweden, then in 1366 he began a war of conquest in south Sweden but soon started negotiations with the Mecklenburgers on their initiative. An agreement securing Valdemar the Skåne provinces, Gotland, and the southern and western provinces of Sweden in return for acknowledging the younger Albrecht as king of Sweden was, however, never implemented, and Duke Albrecht's policy was thus defeated.

For Albrecht a better opportunity soon occurred. In 1367 a mighty coalition of eighty Hanseatic towns was formed in Cologne with a view to making a naval attack on King Valdemar and Denmark in the spring of 1368. The Wendish Hansa towns had earlier reacted to Valdemar's conquest of Gotland by making an unsuccessful war on him in 1362, followed by years of uneasy peace. Now the Hansa was ready for a more definite showdown in order to win more favourable conditions for its merchants in the Skåne Fairs. King Albrecht, his father, and the counts of Holstein agreed to conquer and divide Denmark between them and joined the Hanseatic coalition, and so too did a group of powerful Jylland magnates.

The Hanseatic fleet succeeded in establishing control over the Sound region and conquered the castles there in the course of 1368–9. The Danish defence was led by the council of the realm, headed by the *drost* Henning Podebusk, while King Valdemar went on a long and unsuccessful diplomatic journey to muster support. When the Hanseatic towns had reached their main objective, supremacy in the Sound region, they opened negotiations with the

Danish council and in May 1370 finally concluded the peace of Stralsund. The Danish council confirmed earlier Hanseatic privileges in Denmark which gave German merchants more favourable conditions in the Skåne Fairs than they had enjoyed since 1361; moreover, the market was placed under joint Danish–German administration. For fifteen years the Hansa was to receive two-thirds of the revenues derived from the four castles which guarded the Sound (Helsingborg, Malmö, Skanör, Falsterbo) and the castles were also to be administered under Henning Podebusk's leadership by men who represented the Hanseatic interests, some of them Germans.¹²

The peace of Stralsund testifies to the complete defeat of King Valdemar and has been considered the greatest single triumph in the history of the Hansa. It should, however, be noted that the peace bound the Hansa to the Danish side in the Skåne question and that the combined Danish–German administration of the province had some advantages for the Danes. The Danish crown kept one-third of the revenues from the Skåne castles and the Hansa was no longer an enemy. King Håkon had already in 1368 concluded an armistice with the Hansa; in 1370 it was prolonged for five years until peace was finally made in 1376 with the confirmation of earlier Hanseatic privileges in Norway.

King Valdemar confirmed the peace of Stralsund in 1371, followed by a peace treaty with Mecklenburg. The treaty with Duke Albrecht is remarkable because of the concession given by Valdemar in return for getting back all captured castles and territories: if he died without male issue (his son Christopher had passed away in 1363) the son of his eldest daughter in her Mecklenburg marriage was to take over the Danish throne. This was, however, contrary to a provision of the Stralsund treaty which the king had just approved: that the Hansa should be consulted before the election of a new Danish king. We are in the dark as to Valdemar's real intentions in this matter but it does not seem that he wanted to link the Folkung dynasty with Denmark by favouring his younger daughter's son with King Håkon, Olaf (born 1370). On the other hand, the council of the realm did apparently not accept the Mecklenburg succession.¹³

In Sweden King Albrecht tried to strengthen his position with the support of his father who, together with the counts of Holstein and a large number of German knights, had gradually taken possession of the most important castles and *len*. Popular and aristocratic dissatisfaction with the Mecklenburg

12 J. E. Olesen, 'Der dänische Reichsrat: die hohe Geistlichkeit', in N. Jörn et al., *Der Stralsunder Frieden von 1370 (Prosopographische Studien, Quellen und Darstellungen zur Hansischen Geschichte)*, N.F., 46, Köln–Weimar–Wien, 1998), pp. 207–13.

13 Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 88–9.

rule improved King Håkon's prospects of winning back Sweden and having his father released from imprisonment. There are, however, indications that the Swedish magnates on both sides were now approaching each other in order to save Sweden from further division and unrest, and in 1371 King Albrecht was forced to submit to the conditions of what has been seen as the first Swedish charter of concessions comparable to the Danish *håndfæstninger*: he committed himself to sending his German assistants home and transferring the power to the council of the realm.

When King Håkon advanced into Sweden in the same year he only gained the release of King Magnus and the right to retain the west Swedish provinces he already controlled. In their peace agreement with Albrecht the Folkungs now abandoned their claim to Sweden and the rights that Magnus had earlier possessed in Skåne. The Swedish council came away with the double victory of controlling Albrecht's rule and representing the entire Swedish kingdom, including the western provinces that remained in the hands of the Folkungs.¹⁴

Towards a union of three kingdoms

When King Valdemar died in 1375 the male line of the royal family which had ruled Denmark for 300 years became extinct. The king passed away at an unfortunate time: the relations with the Hanseatic towns and their control of the Skåne castles and provinces were in practice still unresolved; nor had Valdemar managed to regain Schleswig as an escheat after the death of the *len* holder, Count Heinrich, earlier in the same year. The question of the succession to the Danish throne was also unresolved; the choice was between Margrethe with her son Olaf, the heir apparent to the Norwegian throne, and Albrecht, son of Valdemar's elder daughter Ingeborg, grandson of Duke Albrecht of Mecklenburg and nephew of King Albrecht of Sweden.

It was to the advantage of the young Albrecht's candidature that his mother was older than Margrethe and that he was himself older than Olaf; what is more, the Mecklenburgers obtained the support of Emperor Charles IV in the succession question. The Danish council might nevertheless claim full freedom in the matter except for the obligation to consult with the Hansa. It could not be ignorant of the fact that an affiliation with Mecklenburg would put members of the same family on the thrones of both Sweden and Denmark

¹⁴ S. Engström, *Bo Jonsson*, 1, till 1375 (Uppsala, 1935), pp. 78–180; Blom, *Norge i union*, 2, pp. 434–5.

and endanger the independence of the Danish kingdom. On the other hand, the choice of Olaf and a personal union with Norway involved the risk of war with the Mecklenburgers and their allies. At any rate a solution acceptable to the Hansa had to be found.¹⁵

In this situation Queen Margrethe showed her true mettle. Influenced by the hereditary Norwegian order of succession she may at first have entertained plans of taking over the Danish throne as the only surviving heir of her late father, but she soon decided on the alternative strategy of promoting her son's candidature which she did with great energy and political sagacity. Leading Danish prelates and magnates, including the *drost* Henning Podebusk, were won over to her side and from the beginning of 1376, at the latest, the support for Olaf was strong enough to influence the Danish council's negotiations with the Hansa and north German princes in which it was apparently made clear that Albrecht could expect no support in Denmark. As the Hansa was also reluctant to advance his claim and was primarily interested in having the Hanseatic privileges in Denmark confirmed the way was open for Olaf's succession. He was finally elected king at a large national meeting in Slagelse in May 1376 in return for a *håndfæstning* which confirmed the rights of the estates and emphasised Denmark's status as an elective kingdom, thus rejecting the hereditary claim of the Mecklenburgers. Later in the year the peace of Stralsund was confirmed together with the Hanseatic privileges in Denmark. The election of Olaf may be said to have put Denmark under the rule of the Norwegian royal house and thus to have heralded the later Nordic union.

The Mecklenburgers refused to accept Olaf's election and continued their efforts to promote Albrecht's candidature through a short war but mainly by means of negotiation. Their demands, requiring a division of the Danish kingdom, met with some sympathy among the Danish aristocracy, not least in Skåne, and in 1377 the Danish council felt obliged to offer parts of the realm to the Mecklenburgers but shrunk back in face of their demand for half the kingdom. The situation was saved in 1378 by the deaths of Emperor Charles IV and of the prime mover in the Scandinavian policy of the Mecklenburgers, the old Duke Albrecht. The threat from King Albrecht in Sweden had already been averted in advance by the Swedish council under the strong leadership of the *drots* Bo Jonsson (Grip) who made sure that nothing came of Albrecht's declaration of war on Denmark in 1376. The support for the Mecklenburgers

¹⁵ See, for example, i.a. A.Bøgh, 'On the causes of the Kalmar union', in D. Kattinger et al (eds.), *"huru thet war talet i kalmarn": Union und Zusammenarbeit in der nordischen Geschichte. 600 Jahre Kalmarer Union (1397–1997)* (Hamburg, 1997), pp. 9–30.

among the nobility of Skåne must be understood in the light of the difficult position of that province; it was largely under Hanseatic administration and was threatened from both Sweden and Mecklenburg. However, in 1381 peace was established both internally in Skåne and with the nobility across the border with Sweden.¹⁶

The death of king Håkon VI in 1380 had great consequences for the history of Scandinavia. The hereditary succession of his eleven-year-old son Olaf to the Norwegian throne introduced, without any formal agreement, a personal union between Denmark and Norway which lasted for more than 400 years. A Norwegian regency under the leadership of the *drottsete* Ogmund Finnsson, a loyal supporter of Queen Margrethe, was instituted by the Norwegian council. Margrethe was authorised to negotiate with the Hansa on Norway's behalf and before long the management of Norwegian foreign affairs was entirely in her hands. After King Olaf came of age in the mid-1380s Margrethe continued to have the main governmental influence in both kingdoms.¹⁷

The request of the Hansa towns to have their Norwegian privileges renewed was for the time being kept in abeyance by the queen who used the matter as a lever for regaining the Skåne castles. The towns accepted negotiations, the more so as the profits from the castles had proved much smaller than expected and the possession of them had not secured peace and free trade for the Hanseatic merchants in the Sound region. In 1385 Margrethe and Henning Podebusk succeeded in getting the Hansa to hand back the Skåne castles with the Skåne Fairs without obtaining, in return, reparations and confirmation of their Norwegian privileges. In 1386 Margrethe achieved another triumph by making a deal which removed the counts of Holstein from their alliance with the Mecklenburgers. The counts acknowledged Schleswig, already controlled by them, as part of the Danish realm in return for receiving it back as a hereditary *len*. With these achievements behind her Margrethe was better equipped for the diplomatic game over the Swedish inheritance of the Folkung dynasty. Olaf's claim to this inheritance was expressed by adding the title of heir to the kingdom of Sweden to that of king of Denmark and Norway.¹⁸

In Sweden the *drots* Bo Jonsson had reaped a rich harvest from the transfer of power from King Albrecht to the council in 1371; he took over many of Sweden's

16 Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 96–106.

17 H. Koht, *Dronning Margareta og Kalmarunionen* (Oslo, 1956), pp. 52–5; E. Opsahl, 'Norwegen 1319–1397: ein "willenloser Trabant" der Nachbarländer?', in D. Kattinger et al., *"huru thet war talet"*, pp. 148–52.

18 M. Linton, *Drottning Margareta, fullmäktig fru och rätt husbond: Studier i Kalmarunionens förhistoria* (Aarhus, 1971), pp. 67–105, 157–62; Albrechtsen, *Herredømmet*, pp. 49–70.

castles and mortgage *len*, amassing a great wealth of landed property. His will stipulated that his *len* and landed property were to be kept undivided as a means of maintaining the power of the Swedish aristocracy and ten prominent magnates were appointed executors of his estates. When he died in 1386 King Albrecht attempted to have his testament invalidated but met with a rising of powerful Swedish magnates. There was apparently a growing desire among the Swedish opposition to turn to King Olaf, but he died unexpectedly in 1387.¹⁹

In the difficult situation caused by Olaf's death Margrethe acted quickly and effectively. Only a week afterwards she was elected Danish regent at the *landsting* of Lund under the title of 'fully powered lady and mistress and guardian of the realm of Denmark' until the Danish people had accepted her suggestion for a new king. In the following months the other Danish *landstings* followed suit. At Olaf's death Junker Albrecht of Mecklenburg had taken the title of heir apparent to the throne of Denmark but his own death in 1388 put an end to the current Mecklenburg claim.²⁰

At the turn of the year Margrethe went to Norway where in February 1388 the council elected her regent for life in Oslo and thereafter declared that the hereditary royal succession would be reckoned from her with the son of her sister's daughter in her marriage with Duke Vartislav of Pomerania as her nearest heir. The hereditary claim of the Mecklenburgers was terminated once and for all because they had made war on Norway. Formally, the principle of hereditary succession was still adhered to but in fact the council acted as an elective body.²¹

Even before the meeting in Oslo Margrethe had approached the Swedish magnates who opposed King Albrecht. The negotiations continued at Dalaborg castle near the Norwegian border where Bo Jonsson's heirs and testament executors accepted her as regent for life on behalf of the Swedish realm and also declared that they would accept a successor designated by her. These promises were confirmed a few months later by a more representative assembly of magnates. In return Queen Margrethe promised that she would observe Swedish law as it had been before King Albrecht's arrival in Sweden and keep justice accordingly. It was of special importance that all castles were to be governed according to Swedish law, that is, by native men as had been the programme of the Swedish aristocracy since Magnus Eriksson's days.²²

19 Linton, *Drottning Margareta*, pp. 162–3; Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 109–10.

20 Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 110–13.

21 Koht, *Dronning Margareta*, pp. 56–64; Linton, *Drottning Margareta*, pp. 165–8.

22 Linton, *Drottning Margareta*, pp. 168–72; M. Linton, *Margareta, Nordens drottning 1375–1412* (Stockholm, 1997), pp. 98–113, 231–2.

The Dalaborg agreement was a compromise between equal partners. Queen Margrethe could not demand more from the Swedish magnates than they felt was reasonable; in return they were willing to go quite far in order to rid themselves of the Mecklenburg monarchy. The military showdown took place in February 1389 on the plains of Falköping in Västergötland where King Albrecht and his son Erik were taken prisoners. Castles and strongholds now surrendered to Margrethe and in October the Swedish counsellors and magnates handed over the government of Sweden to her. The Mecklenburgers were only able to retain control of Stockholm.

In 1389, at the latest, Duke Vartislaw of Pomerania arrived in Denmark where he handed over his son Bugislav, the later Erik of Pomerania, to Queen Margrethe. In October Erik was acclaimed king by the Norwegian council. The counsellors declared that according to Norwegian law he was the rightful heir to the kingdom of Norway and that all future hereditary succession to the throne would be reckoned from him. This meant that Margrethe gave up her position as life-long Norwegian ruler to become temporary regent until Erik came of age. It seems that she worked to extend the Norwegian hereditary principle to the personal union created by her in the years 1387–9.²³

In Mecklenburg preparations were made to recover what had been lost. For one thing companies of privateers were established, called *Vitalienbrüder* ('victualling brethren') because they transported provisions to the beleaguered town of Stockholm; they harried the Baltic and the North Sea, conquered Gotland, and even obtained bases in Finland. The Hansa under the leadership of Lübeck now resorted to diplomacy in order to have their commercial rights in the Nordic kingdoms confirmed by Margrethe. Hanseatic mediation ended the war between Margrethe and the Mecklenburgers in 1395. King Albrecht was released in return for his promise to pay 60,000 silver marks within three years. Stockholm was placed in pawn with the Hansa which saw this as a guarantee of peaceful conditions that would lead to the renewal of their privileges. If King Albrecht did not pay the release money in time, he was to return to prison or hand over Stockholm to Margrethe. In the following years the queen seems to have supported the activity of the privateers in order to make it difficult for the Hansa to hold onto Stockholm and in 1398 the town was finally handed over to her. Albrecht retained his royal title and maintained his claim to the Swedish throne until his death in 1412.²⁴

²³ Koht, *Dronning Margareta*, pp. 60–4; J. E. Olesen, *Erich von Pommerns Alleinherrschaft 1412–1439/40*, in D. Kattinger et al., "*huru thet war talet*", pp. 200–1.

²⁴ Linton, *Drottning Margareta*, pp. 214–33.

The settlement over Stockholm meant that the Mecklenburgers and the Hansa *de facto* recognised Erik of Pomerania as king of Sweden. There are indications that he had been crowned king of Norway in 1392 and in 1396 he was elected king of Denmark and Sweden.²⁵ Thus, the conditions were now in place for the first and most important in a series of late medieval union meetings in Kalmar, namely that of the summer of 1397, when Erik of Pomerania was crowned king of all three Nordic kingdoms and the Act of Coronation and the Union Document were drawn up, the first with the hanging seals of sixty-seven bishops, counsellors of the realm, and noblemen from the three kingdoms. There was no precedent for this Nordic coronation; the Act of Coronation treated it as a ceremony confirming rather than replacing the previous acceptance of Erik separately in each kingdom.²⁶

The main contents of the Act of Coronation and the Union Document have been rendered above (Chapter 23). The Union Document, dated 20 or possibly 13 July (the same date as the Act of Coronation), is written on paper with ten seals impressed – seven Swedish and two or three Danish (one seal is possibly Norwegian) – whereas seventeen hanging seals are mentioned in the text. The document starts out as an agreed union treaty but ends with the stipulation that it will be confirmed by two parchment documents from each kingdom. Diplomatically the Union Document is thus incomplete and legitimate doubts have been raised about its legal validity.

In Erik Lönnroth's above-mentioned interpretation the two documents represent two different governmental systems and forms of union; while the Act of Coronation reflects the monarchic programme of *regimen regale* the Union Document is an aristocratic expression of *regimen politicum*. Since only the Act of Coronation achieved legal validity it was the monarchy that won the constitutional struggle at the Kalmar meeting. This interpretation has been widely accepted and the general view is now that the Union Document was not confirmed because it clashed with Margrethe's interests whereas 'the Norwegian explanation' that this was due to Norwegian resistance has met with little approval. The basis for the latter explanation, that no Norwegian put his seal to the document, has been called into question by the contention that one of the seals may after all be Norwegian.²⁷

25 E. Haug, 'Erik av Pommerns norske kroning', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 74 (Oslo, 1995), pp. 1–21 and the following discussion with K. Dørum and E. Opsahl.

26 K. Hørby, 'Kalmarunionens statsret', in S. E. Green Pedersen et al. (eds.), *Profiler i nordisk senmiddelalder og renaissance: Festskrift til Poul Enemark* (*Historiske Skrifter*, 2, Aarhus, 1983), pp. 1–9; Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 131–71.

27 N. Skyum-Nielsen, 'Et videnskabeligt falsum i debatten om Kalmarunionen', *Scandia*, 26 (1960), pp. 1–40.

According to Axel E. Christensen the Union Document can be seen as an expression of changes occurring in the aristocratic opinion in the course of the union negotiations in Kalmar, in particular what prelates and magnates felt they could accept as representatives of their kingdoms. The month from the coronation on 17 June has been explained as the time needed to reach a compromise between the different views. However, the result, the Union Document, was not legally validated so that the participants in the meeting had to make do with the issue of the Act of Coronation in which they provided the legal foundation for Erik's rule as the newly crowned king. The question of the form of the union was referred to the competent assemblies of the three kingdoms on the grounds that the constitutional changes required a special authorisation from each kingdom. In this way the immediate problem was solved and a possible conflict between monarchy and aristocracy averted.²⁸

The monarchy came out of the Kalmar meeting perceptibly strengthened. The governing principles written into the Act of Coronation correspond to the actual development of Queen Margrethe's monarchic powers and Erik's after her. The Swedish aristocracy, with its tradition of opposition to the monarchy, showed its willingness to accept the union in the given situation. In 1397 the danger from the Mecklenburgers was still very real; King Albrecht still claimed the Swedish throne, Gotland was under Mecklenburg rule, and Stockholm had not yet surrendered. The Swedish magnates, then, had good reasons for closing ranks around Margrethe and allying themselves with their Danish and Norwegian counterparts. The result was a union which for a period secured peace and fairly ordered relations between the three Nordic kingdoms.²⁹

The strong union kingdom, 1397–1436

The unrestricted authority over the castles given to King Erik and Queen Margrethe by the Act of Coronation enabled them to build up a strong unitary government with closer connections between the kingdoms than suggested by the Union Document (see Chapter 23). The tendencies towards a hereditary monarchy were influenced by the Norwegian tradition which Margrethe had adopted. As guardian and co-regent she continued to have the main governmental influence until her death in 1412.

²⁸ Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 154–71.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 131–4; Linton, *Drottning Margareta*, pp. 233–46.

The system of the union government, centred on Denmark, went hand in hand with strengthened royal finances. Skåne once more became a financial asset to the Crown, the *len* revenues went up, and Margrethe's policies of extra taxation and restitution of crown land contributed to the increased income of the royal treasury in Denmark, apparently with positive effects for that country. Margrethe could no more than her predecessors free the Crown of debt but she avoided becoming dependent on her creditors. During her and Erik's reigns money was coined on the Lübeck pattern but with a somewhat smaller silver content by which the Crown profited.³⁰

Margrethe's rule was strengthened by her close connections with the churches of her kingdom and her cooperation with the papacy over the appointment of bishops and other prelates (Chapter 22). In this way she also increased her influence over the councils of the realms of which the bishops were members. As shown above (Chapter 23) the strong position of the councils when Margrethe took over was reduced towards the end of the fourteenth century, particularly in Norway and Sweden. The leading office of *drost/drottsete/drots* was left vacant in all three kingdoms; nor was a new marshal appointed in Denmark or a *gælker* (treasurer) in Skåne. The union meetings held during the first few years did not develop into a regular institution. Altogether, the aristocracy came to play a more passive political role so that there was no strong counterweight to the centralised monarchic rule.³¹

In the year 1400, when King Erik came of age and formally took over the government as union king, plans for his marriage were discussed at a common Nordic meeting. Soon attention was directed towards England and on an English initiative negotiations started for a double marriage: between King Erik and Philippa, daughter of King Henry IV (1399–1413), and between Erik's sister Katharina and Henry, Prince of Wales. The latter marriage was from the English side intended to give children of Henry and Katharina a claim to rule the union if Erik and Philippa died without issue, but the plan came to nothing because of Scandinavian conciliar resistance. However, a defensive alliance with England was concluded and the wedding between Erik and Philippa was celebrated in 1406.³² As their marriage turned out to be childless King Erik

30 J. Rosén, 'Drottning Margaretas svenska räfst', *Scandia*, 20 (1950), pp. 169–246; Linton, *Drottning Margareta*, pp. 106–56; M. Linton, 'De ekonomiska förutsättningarna för Margaretas politiska program', *Scandia*, 39 (1973), pp. 39–62. See also, B. Losman, 'Drottning Margaretas ekonomi och donationspolitik', *Scandia*, 38 (1972), pp. 26–58.

31 Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 172–98.

32 G. Carlsson, *Medeltidens nordiska unionstanke* (Uppsala, 1945), pp. 83–4; Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 178–81.

selected his cousin, the still under-age Duke Bogislaus of Pomerania-Stolp, as his successor and tried in various ways to ensure his acceptance (Chapter 23). In this he followed the Norwegian succession arrangement from 1389, continuing to work towards a hereditary union monarchy.³³

The united Nordic kingdoms became a factor in European politics. Erik's marriage to Philippa raised his standing at the German imperial court where he was treated as one of Europe's most important monarchs. It also enhanced the prestige of the union in the eyes of important Baltic powers such as the Hansa and the Teutonic Order, whose interests were bound to suffer from Erik's favouring of English merchants in the Sound region.³⁴

Reconciliation with the Hansa in 1395 had been one of the more important conditions for the Kalmar meeting of 1397 and there was a cordial understanding between the parties, though the question of privileges and injustices committed against merchants and their goods, especially in the Sound and the Baltic region, led to reservations on both sides. However, Margrethe succeeded in negotiating a concerted Danish–Hanseatic action against piracy in the Baltic. As for the Teutonic Order, it had conquered Gotland in 1398 and claimed that it held the island in pawn from King Albrecht, refusing to negotiate with Margrethe about her claims and referring her to Albrecht. In 1404 Margrethe made an attack on Gotland which paved the way for her to buy Albrecht's alleged right to the island from him. By Hanseatic mediation a reconciliation with the Teutonic Order was effected in 1406–7.³⁵

In its relations with the Hansa the monarchy profited from the fact that the precise character of the Hanseatic commercial privileges was unclear as long as the king confirmed the former rights of each separate town without specifying them. This was a policy which increased the existing differences between the most and the least favoured of the German merchant towns. The Nordic monarchy knew how to utilise this feature and also the increased competition encountered by the German merchants in the fifteenth century, first from English and then from Dutch merchants. In Iceland King

33 Olesen, *Rigsråd – Kongemagt – Union*; J. E. Olesen, 'Erik af Pommern og Kalmarunionen: Regeringssystemets udformning 1389–1439', in P. Ingesman and J. V. Jensen (eds.), *Dannemark i senmiddelalderen*, pp. 143–65; Olesen, 'Erich von Pommerns Alleinherrschaft', pp. 206–8; R.-G. Werlich, 'Bugislaw IX. von Pommern-Stolp – ein Pommer in den dynastischen Planen der nordischen Reiche in der ersten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts', in H. Wernicke and R.-G. Werlich (eds.), *Pommern: Geschichte – Kultur – Wissenschaft*. 2. *Kolloquium zur Pommerschen Geschichte* (Greifswald, 1992), pp. 37–58.

34 Olesen, 'Erich von Pommerns Alleinherrschaft', pp. 214–17; T. Riis (ed.), *Studien zur Geschichte des Ostseeraumes*, 1 (Odense, 1995).

35 K. Erslev, *Dronning Margrethe og Kalmarunionens grundlæggelse* (København, 1882; repr. Viborg, 1971), pp. 368–79.

Erik followed a *terra nostra* policy in order to put a stop to the growing English influence.³⁶

The duchy of Schleswig would for many years keep the union government busy. King Valdemar IV had acquired its northern part but the southern part had been mortgaged to the counts of Holstein who did not want to cede the area. The position of the counts was strengthened in the years after 1375 and in 1386 Gerhard, the eldest son of Count Heinrich, received the duchy in fief together with his brothers. Thus the duchy's connection with the Danish kingdom was maintained but it was ruled independently by Count Gerhard until he died in 1404, leaving his wife with three under-age sons for whom King Erik, in his capacity as feudal lord, became guardian. For years, Queen Margrethe's policy, like that of her father's, was to redeem castles and landed property without questioning the rights of the ducal family, but in 1409 she exploited breaches of the peace by local nobles to demand an indemnity for which she received the town of Flensburg in pawn.³⁷

However, if the gains made by the monarchy in these years were to last, war was inevitable. It erupted in 1410 when King Erik conquered the islands of Ærø and Als while the Danish land forces suffered defeat in southern Schleswig. Margrethe succeeded in arranging an armistice for five years by which she retained Flensburg. It was here that she died on board a ship in the harbour in October 1412 after she had entered the town and proclaimed herself and King Erik its masters. The founding mother of the union was interred in Sorø Priory Church but in 1413 her close collaborator Bishop Peder Lodehat had her earthly remains transferred to Roskilde Cathedral.³⁸

King Erik worked consistently to deprive the counts of Holstein of the right to the duchy of Schleswig and demanded the right of redemption of the ducal castles. In 1413 he summoned the counts to the very last *Danehof* on the charge that they had failed in their duty to render service to their lord, the Danish king. The counts did not obey the summons and the *hof*, as a court, decided that the duchy should revert to the king. Count Gerhard's sons refused to accept the decision even though it was confirmed by the German-Roman King Sigismund in 1415, but a large number of Holstein noblemen in Schleswig went over to the king. The military struggle over Schleswig lasted, with interruptions, until

36 J. E. Olesen, 'Die preussischen Hansestädte in der nordischen Politik 1434–1450', in N. Jörn et al. (eds.), *"kopet uns werk by tyden": Festschrift für Walter Stark zum 75. Geburtstag* (Schwerin, 1999), pp. 215–22; P. Enemark, 'Den økonomiske baggrund for de første oldenborgske kongers udenrigspolitik', *Jyske Samlinger*, 4 (1957), pp. 1–20; N. Bjørgo, '800–1536. Makt og avmakt', in Bjørgo et al., *Norsk utenrikspolitikkens historie*, 1, pp. 123–32.

37 Erslev, *Dronning Margrethe*, pp. 390–403.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 429–37.

1432. King Erik stood firm on the judgement of King Sigismund from 1415 which he managed to have strengthened in 1424 when Schleswig was declared part of the Danish kingdom.³⁹

Through the aggressive policy conducted by Erik towards the Hansa from 1415–16 the Schleswig problem was linked with the entire foreign and trading policy of the union. Erik accused Lübeck of favouring the Holsteiners and kept the confirmation of the Hanseatic privileges in Scandinavia in abeyance. He supported domestic trade and sought to increase the English and evidently also the Dutch share of the commerce in the Sound region. When the Hansa in 1422 decided to blockade the three Nordic kingdoms the king retaliated by closing the Sound to all Hanseatic ships which resulted in a treaty of mutual assistance in the following year.

However, Erik did not succeed in obtaining Hanseatic assistance in implementing King Sigismund's judicial decision about Schleswig. On the contrary, his deprecatory attitude to the Hansa's efforts of mediation and several infringements of its privileges led it to approach the counts of Holstein. In 1426 Lübeck and the Wendish towns decided to wage a naval war on Denmark in order to regain their political influence and secure the continuance of their commercial rights in Scandinavia, but their fleet was defeated in the Sound in 1427. Some time around 1429 King Erik began the practice, so rich in consequences, of exacting Sound dues from all ships passing between Krogen (Kronborg) and Helsingborg, demanding one noble from each ship without regard to the size of the cargo.⁴⁰

Erik's land war against the counts of Holstein, who were supported by Lübeck and the Hansa, did not go so well. In 1431 the Holsteiners took the town of Flensburg and two important castles, which in 1432 led to a five-year armistice based on the status quo. Duke Adolph, the only remaining son of Count Gerhard, kept the larger part of Schleswig while the king held Haderslev *len* with Ærø and a few other small possessions, securing for himself a future possibility of regaining his right to the duchy.

The particular attention given by Erik to the Sound region has already been touched upon. He began to build the castle of Malmöhus and north

39 K. Erslev, *Erik af Pommern, hans kamp for Sønderjylland og Kalmarunionens opløsning* (København, 1901; repr. Viborg, 1971), pp. 1–104; Z. H. Nowak, 'Zum National- und Staatsbewusstsein im spätmittelalterlichen Dänemark', in A. Czacharowski (ed.), *Nationale, ethnische Minderheiten und regional Identitäten in Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Torun, 1994), pp. 95–101.

40 Erslev, *Erik af Pommern*, pp. 198–42; K. Fritze, *Am Wendepunkt der Hanse* (Berlin, 1968); K. Hørby, 'Øresundstolden og den skånske skibstold: Spørgsmålet om kontinuitet', in *Middelalderstudier tilegnede Aksel E. Christensen på tresårsdagen* (København, 1966), pp. 245–72.

of Malmö founded the town of Landskrona, favouring Englishmen and other West Europeans in its trade. Close by Helsingør he commissioned the castle of Krogen which, together with Helsingborg, was intended to guard the northern entrance to the Sound. In 1417 the king acquired the town of København from the bishop of Roskilde and started its development towards becoming the capital of Denmark. Altogether, he appears to have had a keen eye for the financial possibilities of the Sound region and he paid attention to the region of Store Bælt as well.⁴¹

It was obviously Erik's ambition to establish the Scandinavian union as a major power in the Baltic where the power balance had changed after the defeat of the Teutonic Order by Poland–Lithuania. He worked to strengthen his ties with Poland and in 1419 concluded a treaty with that kingdom. He also had plans to regain the former Danish dominion over Estonia but his policy towards Estonia and the Teutonic Order was soon overshadowed by the demands of the war against the Holsteiners.⁴²

Within the union Norway was governed from Denmark and the Norwegian council only met occasionally. The Norwegian kingdom had no central place in Erik's foreign and commercial policy and gave him few problems. However, hardly a year passed without Swedish counsellors visiting his court or staying there in attendance, and it was in Sweden that he met with the problems which were eventually to deprive him of his kingdoms.⁴³

Since the early years of the Kalmar Union the Swedish castles and *len* had been administered by the Crown which in Erik's days made increased use of foreign (especially German and Danish) and Swedish bailiffs, setting aside the native high nobility. The king's need of money for the war against the Holsteiners and the Hansa led to particularly harsh extra taxation in Sweden which bred dissatisfaction among the general population, the more so as the conflict with the Hansa impeded the Swedish export trade. When the Swedish church, too, was forced to contribute more than voluntary war aid there were protests by the archbishop of Uppsala and a few other bishops in 1427. For a time dissatisfaction in Sweden was staved off by Queen Philippa who through her repeated visits to the country until her death in 1430 maintained a flexible

41 Olesen, 'Erich von Pommerns Alleinherrschaft', pp. 215–16.

42 T. Riis, 'Der polnisch-dänische Vertrag 1419 und die Vormachtstellung im Ostseegebiet', in *Studien zur Geschichte des Ostseeraumes*, 1, pp. 67–78; W. Møllerup, *Danmarks Forhold til Liffland fra Salget af Estland til Ordensstatens Opløsning (1346–1561)* (København, 1880), pp. 7–13; H. Rebas, *Infiltration och handel: Studier i senmedeltida nordisk Balticumpolitik i tiden omkring 1440–1479* (Göteborg, 1976), pp. 28–30; G. Carlsson, 'König Erich der Pommer und sein baltischer Imperialismus', *Baltische Studien*, N.F., 40 (Stettin, 1938), pp. 1–17.

43 For the following, see especially Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 200–42; Olesen, *Rigsråd*, pp. 19–64; Larsson, *Kalmarunionens tid*, 179–227.

rule and conducted accommodating negotiations with the Swedish bishops and magnates.

The early 1430s saw the controversy over the election to the archiepiscopal see of Uppsala (Chapter 22) and in 1434 there followed the rebellion of Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson which began in Dalarna and soon spread all over Sweden. The Swedish council sided with the opposition to the king and a constitutional programme was worked out. King Erik was to rule Sweden according to the Landlaw, that is to say, he was to be assisted by native helpers with the council of the realm as the real governing body (Chapter 23). After the rebellious commonalty had joined hands with the ecclesiastical and secular counsellors in August 1434 a letter of withdrawing allegiance was sent to King Erik, referring to the breaches of the law committed by him and his bailiffs in Sweden. This led to a sequence of negotiations and armistices between the king and his opponents.

Fearing that the rebels would unite with the Hansa, in July 1435 Erik concluded peace with the Wendish Hansa towns and the Holsteiners whereby Count Adolph was permitted to keep for life the areas he had taken possession of in Schleswig and the king gave up collecting Sound dues from Wendish Hansa ships. He also made large concessions to the Swedish council in order to recover the lost castles. The intention was that the conflict between the king and the Swedes was to be resolved by the Danish and Norwegian counsellors together with representatives of the Wendish Hansa towns at a union meeting in Kalmar in 1436.

The Norwegians, however, did not go to Kalmar and the Danes, who were won over to the aristocratic-constitutional viewpoint of the Swedes, recommended that Erik accept the Swedish demands for government in accordance with the advice of the counsellors and based on the Landlaw and old privileges and customs. The king had to give in to these demands and a document of reconciliation was drawn up with the Danish counsellors and the Wendish Hansa towns as guarantors. Erik was again to be recognised as king of Sweden on the basis of the Union Document of 1397 which was now revived and interpreted to the effect that all castles and *len* were to be given to native men with the advice of the counsellors of the realms. Thus the unitary government of the union kingdoms was transformed into an alliance of three independent realms, each ruled by its council and with limited mutual fellowship.

The Kalmar meeting of 1436 was a decisive turning point in the history of the Nordic Union. King Erik had bound himself to govern Sweden in the future in accordance with the constitutional programme of the Swedish council but more and very difficult negotiations were to come. The negotiations in

Kalmar did not affect Norway, where Erik was still ruling as hereditary king, but created a very complicated situation in Denmark. Nothing was changed in the constitutional status of that kingdom and the counsellors could only effect their obligation to guarantee the reconciliation agreement against the will of the king by usurping his power. In reality the constitutional problem of the Kalmar meeting had been transferred from Sweden to Denmark.

The deposition of King Erik

The decisions made at the Kalmar meeting were never implemented. In the king's absence the new Swedish council constituted itself under the leadership of the *drots* Krister Nilsson (Vasa) and the marshal Karl Knutsson (Bonde), and a redistribution of castles and *len* was undertaken. The magnates also began a showdown with their former allies, the leaders of the popular uprising, who were executed.⁴⁴

King Erik consistently refused to cooperate with the Swedish council, which permitted Karl Knutsson to act more and more as the real regent of the kingdom. This did not mean that Erik had given up his title as king. In the early summer of 1437 he went on a diplomatic journey, first to the grand master of the Teutonic Order and the Prussian Hansa towns, especially Danzig, and then to his relatives in Pomerania. This made the Danish and Swedish councillors nervous, making them try to establish contact with him and have the Hansa intervene. However, King Erik showed himself quite unresponsive and his manoeuvring seems to indicate that he was planning to use force to be reinstated as king, first in Denmark where he still had faithful followers and where the constitutional relations between king and council were still unchanged. In the autumn of 1437 he finally went to Denmark with a small force after having sent home from Rügen the sizable fleet he had collected.

The Danish counsellors were willing to negotiate with Erik, though they had reservations about accepting Duke Bogislaus as his successor, and there was also eagerness in Sweden to win Erik back. He was visited in Denmark by delegates from the Swedish council who obtained his agreement to participate in a Swedish–Danish meeting in Kalmar in the summer of 1438 in order to implement the agreements of 1436. With this done the Swedish council forced Karl Knutsson to retire from his position as *rikshövitsman* (captain of the realm).

44 For the following, see Olesen, *Rigsråd*, pp. 65–116; Christensen, *Kalmarunionen*, pp. 240–61; G. A. Blom, 'Warum die Norweger König Erich von Pommern den Gehorsam nicht kündigen wollten', *Acta Visbyensia*, 4, *Kultur und Politik im Ostseeraum und im Norden 1350–1450* (Kungsbacka, 1971), pp. 71–9.

At Easter 1438 difficult negotiations were carried out between Erik and the Danish council over the Swedish suggestions for the coming Kalmar meeting and Duke Bogislaus' succession. The king did not want to go to Kalmar in person but wished to be represented by Danish counsellors who were to act on his behalf; it appears that he demanded that the governmental dispositions of the Swedish council after the Kalmar settlement of 1436 be revoked and further concessions made, especially the re-establishment of his authority over castles and *len*. These demands do not seem to have caused insurmountable difficulties but the negotiations broke down over Erik's claim that Duke Bogislaus be accepted as his successor or as regent in his place, which the council rejected completely. Erik now revoked the authorisation he had given for the Kalmar negotiations and let Bogislaus have the island of Fyn with three castles while his other relatives kept castles he had previously given them in southern Denmark. The break was now final; Erik returned to Gotland and a group of Danish counsellors went to Kalmar.

In Kalmar the situation was unsatisfactory for both the Danish and Swedish counsellors. They knew Erik's demands, which in reality constituted an ultimatum, but as matters stood they did not really know whether they had a king. The possibility of finding a new king was discussed but they could not agree on a candidate. The Danish delegation no doubt had in mind the son of King Erik's sister, Christopher of Bavaria, the only possible candidate of royal blood but he was as yet not attractive enough from a Swedish viewpoint. Karl Knutsson, at least, wanted rather to strengthen his own candidature than to give up the power he had already acquired. The Danish and Swedish counsellors did, however, agree on one point: they would not give up the alliance between the kingdoms. By adopting a new Nordic union treaty in July 1438 they achieved a far-reaching and long-lasting result.

As a basis for the new agreement the participants in the meeting not only had the Union Document of 1397; there was also an undated but well prepared draft of a union statute. It may have been available already at the Kalmar meeting of 1436 but it seems more likely that it was drawn up as a consequence of the problems which had then been identified. The comprehensive draft looks like a careful attempt to reformulate and expand the Union Document in the light of the changed political and ideological circumstances of the 1430s. The three kingdoms were to stay together under a common king but with equal status as fully independent realms. The hereditary kingdom had disappeared and its place had been taken by a common election of a king according to a complicated election system, in which political insight and experience were combined with representation of the estates, including burghers and peasants.

The king was to govern with the advice of the councils and reside in all three kingdoms on an annual and fair rota system. Each kingdom was to have extensive autonomy under the leadership of competent officials of the realm. The draft reveals awareness of both current European societal theory and the political debate in the previous union meetings.

In the end, however, the Kalmar treaty of 1438 was based on the Union Document of 1397 and not on the draft mentioned, though it was apparently influenced by the latter. The permanent union between the kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden and their future enjoyment of their separate laws and rights were confirmed. The question whether the union should also be permanently personal, with one king in common, was, however deferred to later negotiations; the Swedish counsellors avoided a decision on this matter by referring to their lack of authority and the absence of Norwegian counsellors. Obviously the possibility of King Erik's deposition was a consideration when the treaty tried to prevent future war between the kingdoms and stipulated that none was to elect a new king before a common meeting had considered the question and decided whether it would be best to have one or more kings. In any case, the unity of the kingdoms was to continue.

The provisions of the Kalmar treaty of 1438 appear rather scant compared with those of its precursors. The treaty also lacks the democratic approach of the undated union draft on the election of a new king but it is no less opposed to royal dominance in the union government. In principle it signals a change of the basis of the union: the prerequisite of a common king is replaced by the intention of the kingdoms, as represented by their councils, to stay together. In reality the councils were thus made superior to the monarchy. At the same time the treaty of 1438 reduced the former union government to a Nordic confederation without any agencies for solving the few and generally recognised common tasks.

The Swedish delegates at the Kalmar meeting rejected King Erik's demands but the Swedish aristocracy was divided in the question of the succession. Karl Knutsson worked eagerly for his own candidature but proved to be no rallying point for the aristocracy; for one thing, he would hardly be acceptable to the neighbouring kingdoms and was thus a threat to the union. At first a conciliatory union policy seems to have gained the upper hand among the counsellors and magnates, on the initiative of the Swedish bishops under the leadership of the new archbishop, Nicolaus Ragvaldi, but soon Karl Knutsson was in the lead again. At a council meeting in October 1438 he was elected supervisor of the realm and took a tough line with his opponents. The last remnants of the peasant uprising in Dalarna were put down, after which Karl

turned on his aristocratic opponents: the Stenssons, who held the east coast castles of Kalmar (on behalf of King Erik) and Stegeborg, and the *drots* Krister Nilsson who was imprisoned. Karl's harsh subjugation of most of the country (with the exception of the eastern areas held by the Stenssons) awakened a latent opposition against him and finally King Erik was drawn out of his passivity. He appointed Nils Stensson marshal in Karl Knutsson's place and had him head a royal army which from Gotland relieved the besieged east coast castles and took possession of most of Östergötland. Once more the Swedes were divided by internal power struggles and civil war.

What happened in Sweden strengthened the candidature of Christopher of Bavaria. In the autumn of 1438 the Danish council had offered him the position of Danish regent with the possibility of becoming both Danish and union king. King Erik's absence and lack of interest in Danish affairs paved the way for his deposition which was finally effected by the Danish council at a meeting in Lübeck in June 1439. Foreign support for the decision was secured by granting the Wendish Hansa towns extended privileges and promising Duke Adolph the remaining parts of Schleswig (Haderslev and Ærø). Thus, large parts of King Erik's foreign policy were abandoned for the sake of domestic peace and union relations.

In Sweden supporters of the union, including the bishops and the moderate knights, now dominated the council. They still supported Karl Knutsson in the spring of 1439 but in order to end the civil war they took a firmer line in the following summer and adhered to the Kalmar treaty of 1438. They abstained from a categorical deposition of King Erik but sent him alternatives: he could either keep his title as king and an annual pension or he could abdicate; in either case they were determined to let Duke Christopher take over the government, either on behalf of Erik as regent or as duly elected king. They would have preferred a native king but that was out of the question if the Kalmar treaty was to be observed.

The Swedish ultimatum and the Danish council's letter of dismissal caused King Erik to go to Stegeborg in order to support Nils Stensson. However, Karl Knutsson proved the stronger party in the military confrontation and soon concluded an armistice with Erik whose fighting spirit and political energy was now exhausted as far as Sweden was concerned. Shortly afterwards he was back in Gotland and at a meeting in October 1439 the Swedish prelates and magnates sent him a letter withdrawing their allegiance. It is not clear how much coordination there was between the Danish and the Swedish councils but at any rate Christopher was not slow in offering himself as a candidate for the Swedish throne.

In reality, King Erik had now nothing left but the hereditary kingdom of Norway. For a long time he had shown a passive attitude towards the Norwegian counsellors' request for reforms but changed his position in face of a delegation sent to Gotland in 1439. He promised to revive the office of *drottsete* which he did by later appointing Sigurd Jonsson. In return he obtained Norwegian military support against his Swedish antagonists and it was confirmed that at his death the Norwegians' allegiance would be transferred to Duke Bogislaus. Until the summer of 1440 Sigurd Jonsson and the majority of the Norwegian magnates withstood all the attempts made by the Danish and Swedish counsellors to have them depose King Erik, demanding that he should come to Norway and take over the rule of the kingdom. But in the end his lack of response and the harrying of the south Norwegian coast by his Dutch allies (see below) caused the Norwegian council and magnates to prepare a letter declaring the withdrawal of their allegiance in August 1440. It was taken by envoys who were stopped in Denmark and was not dispatched anew until February 1441 together with a last request that Erik come to the rescue of Norway. No answer ever arrived.

Christopher of Bavaria – a compromise

In July 1439, after the deposition of King Erik in June, Duke Christopher of Bavaria arrived in København to be acclaimed and given allegiance as Danish regent. At the same time the Swedish council was inclined to depose Erik and accept Christopher but still refrained from electing the latter in a meeting with Danish delegates in November, again referring to lack of authorisation and the absence of the Norwegians. However, the Danish–Swedish agreement of 1438 was confirmed and a new Kalmar meeting was scheduled for the summer of 1440 when, if the Norwegians did not attend, Denmark and Sweden would proceed on their own to elect the king.⁴⁵

The agreement of November 1439 was broken when the Danish council elected Christopher king of Denmark in April 1440. The decision was influenced by the threat of cooperation between Erik of Pomerania and the Dutch

⁴⁵ For the reign of Christopher of Bavaria, see Olesen, *Rigsråd*, pp. 117–378; J. E. Olesen, 'Christopher of Bavaria, King of Denmark, Norway and Sweden (1440–1448): Scandinavia and Southern Germany in the 15th Century', in W. Paravicini (ed.), *Nord und Süd in der deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters (Kieler Historische Studien, 34, Sigmaringen, 1990)*, pp. 109–36; J. E. Olesen, 'Christoffer af Bayerns forleningspolitik i Oberpfalz', *Forum medievale*, 11 (1985), pp. 154–66; J. E. Olesen (ed.), *Christoffer af Bayerns breve 1440–1448 vedrørende hans bayerske hertugdømme* (København, 198); A. E. Christensen, 'Christoffer af Bayern som unionskonge', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 96 (København, 1996), pp. 269–312; Larsson, *Kalmarunionens tid*, pp. 250–62.

and the wish to improve relations with Duke Adolph who was given the duchy of Schleswig as a fief by King Christopher. Representatives of the Wendish Hansa towns participated in the reconciliation with Duke Adolph and sought to clarify their relations with the Danes. A strengthened Danish–Hanseatic siege was now laid against the two Sound castles which were still faithful to Erik.

At the Kalmar meeting in 1440 union relations were confirmed. In face of the Norwegian disinclination to participate even greater efforts were made by the Danish delegates to win over the Swedish counsellors for Christopher. They were asked for a reply before the end of September which also brought increased pressure to bear on the Norwegian council. The Danish–Wendish military effort prevented the Dutch fleet from entering the Sound and effected the surrender of the two Sound castles. The subsequent Dutch harrying of places along the south Norwegian coast contributed to the Norwegian counsellors' decision to threaten King Erik with deposition in August. Towards the end of 1440 the Swedes elected Christopher king at a meeting in Arboga in return for an accession charter with conciliar-constitutional guarantees. At the same time a meeting was planned in Lödöse in February 1441 to negotiate a union *håndfæstning* and treaty.

The Norwegian counsellors appeared in Lödöse, firmly resolved to maintain the union and free themselves of King Erik. A treaty was made with the Swedish council, binding the two kingdoms closer together than the Kalmar agreement of 1438 had united Sweden and Denmark; this alliance was to be confirmed and expanded at a union meeting in Kalmar in the following summer. The Swedish magnates were aiming at a Nordic union based on contracts between the councils and restricting the power of the common king. However, King Christopher did not want to issue a union *håndfæstning* and the Danish council also seems to have been against an elaborate union agreement which might weaken Denmark's position and interests. Consequently, only individual Danish counsellors were sent to the Lödöse meeting without authorisation to make binding commitments. The Danish plan was to postpone a union settlement until peace had been made with the Dutch and the Swedish constitutional claims could be reduced by Hanseatic mediation; after that confirmation of the Hansa's privileges and its freedom from paying Sound dues might be considered.

The Danish plan broke down in the spring of 1441 when a serious peasant rising occurred in northern Jylland, the negotiations with the Dutch were delayed and Norway's position remained unresolved. In April Christopher found it best to confirm his Swedish accession charter but he could still hope for a

favourable union agreement in Kalmar where it was planned to put Erik of Pomerania before a court in the presence of Hanseatic representatives. However, Erik had no intention of appearing in court and the Swedes did not want the Hansa represented at internal union negotiations. As the Danish possibilities of influencing the union relations had now diminished perceptibly a settlement was made with the Hansa and peace concluded with the Dutch, involving an armistice between the Dutch and the Hansa for ten years. The Danish privileges of the Hansa were confirmed and the freedom from payment of Sound dues guaranteed temporarily. As for the Dutch, their presence in the Baltic was now confirmed, which opened up the possibility of a Scandinavian policy using the Dutch as a counterweight to the Hanseatic commercial dominance.

In King Christopher's absence negotiations were carried out in Kalmar between the Swedish and Norwegian counsellors of the realm and a new treaty was concluded in August. The internal rule of the kingdoms was dealt with in much greater detail than in former documents and it was made clear that the federation of the two aristocratic-constitutional kingdoms would be superior to the personal union they might establish. The treaty was to be ratified by the full councils and properly sealed copies exchanged at the next union meeting in Lödöse in the summer of 1442. The Swedish council was still aiming at a Nordic union treaty that would restrict Christopher's power and be valid at least for his reign. In the meantime his position of constitutional king of Sweden was established both in theory and practice.

In September 1441 King Christopher was acclaimed king in Stockholm and later given allegiance at Mora and crowned in Uppsala Cathedral. He stayed in Sweden for the whole winter and was kept busy with much needed royal administration. The king and council mediated between Karl Knutsson and Krister Nilsson. Karl's position in Finland, which became increasingly politically important in the fifteenth century, was weakened to the advantage of Krister which would clearly not soften Karl's attitude to the new government. In western Finland Christopher had the support of the native nobility whose influence was growing stronger and in the spring of 1442 Karl was forced to give up the castle of Åbo in return for regaining Viborg.

During his stay in Sweden Christopher confirmed the revised Swedish Landlaw (Chapter 23). The law-code was a result of the council government of the interregnum and is marked by Archbishop Nicolaus Ragnvaldi's national, ecclesiastical, and conciliar ideology, underscoring the elective character of the monarchy. Christopher and the Swedish council used delaying tactics against Erik of Pomerania in Gotland and his negotiations with the

Teutonic Order. The Nordic kingdoms were in a superior position and one condition for negotiation was that the old king desist from his privateering activities.⁴⁶

The date of the inter-Nordic meeting in Lödöse 1442 was changed to May. The Norwegian *drottsete* and council had mustered the support of representatives of the commonalty of towns and rural districts who on 1 June empowered the council to accept Christopher as king of Norway, after which he was crowned in Oslo in July. Formally, clear elective terms were avoided in the authorisation given to the council, but in fact this was an election as the nearest in line for the throne according to the current order of succession was Duke Bogislaus. In Lödöse the counsellors of the three kingdoms apparently negotiated in full harmony with their new common king. The Norwegian–Swedish treaty from Kalmar appears to have been ratified but no new union constitution was seriously discussed, nor was one realised in the rest of Christopher's reign. In this matter the interests of the king and the Danish council seem to have prevailed. A first step towards common Nordic legislation was, however, taken in the form of peace stipulations, though they were issued separately for each kingdom.

On New Year's Day 1443 Christopher was crowned archking (*archirex*) of Denmark by Archbishop Hans Laxmand, a title which has been interpreted as an expression of a real royal–ecclesiastical dyarchy (Chapter 22). It can also be seen as a rhetorical presentation of the young king to contemporary Europe, indicating that his rank was above that of other princes and his position just below that of the German emperor. Christopher's German origin, the German pattern of his coronation oath and the presence of German princes indicate that the king himself was behind the title together with the archbishop.⁴⁷

After the unrest of the 1430s the Nordic union was now re-established with Christopher of Bavaria as king of all three kingdoms and the counsellors of the realm as the actual rulers in each kingdom. In Denmark Hans Laxmand seems to have favoured a Union after an aristocratic-constitutional pattern but he was hardly inclined to accept extensive national independence to the exclusion of any system of union government, as set forth in the undated draft of a union statute written sometime between 1436 and 1438. In the winter of 1440–1 he had probably been as unwilling as King Christopher and his colleagues in

46 For the negotiations with the Teutonic Order, see also G. A. Lögdberg, *De nordiska konungarna och Tyska Orden 1441–1457* (Uppsala, 1935); K. E. Murawski, *Zwischen Tannenberg und Thorn: Die Geschichte des Deutschen Ordens unter dem Hochmeister Konrad von Erlichhausen 1441–1449* (Göttingen, 1953), pp. 262–304.

47 J. E. Olesen, 'Archiregem regni Daniae', in H. F. Nielsen (ed.), *Twenty-eight Papers Presented to Hans Bekker-Nielsen* (Odense, 1993), pp. 205–16.

the Danish council to accept the unilateral Swedish demands for a national constitutional monarchy. They were rather in favour of a Nordic council drawn from all three realms, though there was hardly complete agreement among them about the division of authority between the king and such a council.

In Christopher's reign cooperation between the Nordic kingdoms was mainly limited to the meetings of the councils of each realm with the king. Apart from the king the Union Document of 1397 was still the only common foundation of the union, but it was significant more in principle than as enforceable law because its precepts might be viewed as partly obsolete and not in full harmony with later agreements, such as the bilateral Danish–Swedish and Swedish–Norwegian treaties of 1438 and 1441; nor was it possible to make it agree formally with King Christopher's Swedish accession charter. The bilateral treaties represent a weakened union when compared not only with the unitary government of Erik of Pomerania, based on the Act of Coronation, but also with the Union Document and the draft of a union statute sometime in the years 1436–8 with its new ideas of a union constitution. In the bilateral treaties the relations between Denmark and Norway were only indirectly touched on and there were no provisions for common governmental agencies. The Nordic union of Christopher's days may then be regarded as a rather imperfect peace league which achieved working status through the king's person. The union's weakness was above all caused by the Swedish demands for national independence and the concessions given by King Christopher (cf. Chapter 23).

Union problems were also caused by the fact that Christopher had promised to support Swedish demands for the solution of Nordic issues, even though they had been questioned by both Danes and Norwegians. Christopher's royal oath committed him to take Gotland away from Erik of Pomerania but this was a controversial issue which could not be solved unilaterally because Denmark, too, had a claim to the island. In negotiations on Gotland in 1446, when an armistice with Erik was concluded, Christopher and the Danish counsellors were able to find common ground to the dissatisfaction of Karl Knutsson and other Swedish counsellors. Another controversial issue, which concerned only Norway and Sweden, was the special customs due demanded by the Norwegians at Bohus which the Swedes viewed as unjustified.

In reality, King Christopher could only rule the union through a flexible policy of negotiation. He fulfilled his obligations in all essential matters according to his accession promises and governed all three kingdoms with the advice of the councils of the realms. In Denmark and Sweden a rule of officials of the realm, drawn from the conciliar aristocracy, was organised but in

Sweden things did not go exactly as planned. Here the king was to rule in conjunction with the *drots* and the marshal but the former office disappeared at an early stage. It had been promised to Karl Knutsson but he had to hand it over temporarily to the old Krister Nilsson on whose death in 1442 the office was abolished.

King Christopher's relations with the councils and the aristocracy in general appears to have been fairly harmonious, although there were some disagreements. In Sweden he appointed the ruling committee of counsellors which had been demanded. Though no officials of the realm are known from Norway the council kept much of its influence from the preceding years of crisis (Chapter 23) and the number of counsellors was increased. In all three kingdoms the local administration was decidedly national in character; the holding of castles and *len* as well as other offices was regularly reserved for native men, but in Sweden these were generally men of the old magnate families whereas in Norway such advantages could also be given to immigrants who had married into the old and powerful families. The king enjoyed good relations with the bishops who were strongly influenced by the conciliar movement (Chapter 22).

The king was regularly accompanied by counsellors from all three kingdoms and almost every year large meetings of the leading men of the union were held in København or Stockholm. Aside from commercial and municipal affairs, in which royal initiatives can be perceived, Christopher seems to have entrusted local affairs to the national authorities. He was, however, very active in foreign policy, particularly with regard to the relations with the Hanseatic League and the Gotland problem, including relations with his uncle, Erik of Pomerania, and contacts with the Teutonic Order. In matters of foreign policy there were persistent differences between the king and the counsellors of the realms, in Norway's case particularly in connection with the Hanseatic privileges, in Sweden primarily in connection with the Gotland question.

King Christopher maintained his connections with his family duchy and several German princes. In his efforts to strengthen his position he surrounded himself with Bavarian courtiers but was forced to send some of them home when his wedding to Dorothea of Brandenburg was celebrated in 1445. The young queen's coronation was a symbolical expression of Christopher's stubborn clinging to the greatest possible Nordic communion and the same attitude is confirmed by the morning gift she received, consisting of a substantial life interest, equally divided between the three kingdoms and his ancestral duchy in Oberpfalz. In his last years Christopher succeeded in increasing his own influence at the expense of at least the Danish counsellors; this was due to improved

borrowing possibilities, the building up of the central administration, and the reduced significance of the council of Basel.

King Christopher died as unchallenged king in early January 1448, on his way to a meeting with the Swedish counsellors. He was no stranger to the politico-tactical game and seems to have conducted a balanced policy with a strong sense of the art of the possible. In several respects the Nordic union during his reign fulfilled the aristocratic demands for political influence, not least as regards the holding of castles, *len* and offices, and also ecclesiastical independence. There was a functioning royal authority which secured internal peace on the conditions of the aristocracy.

Succession conflict 1448–50

After King Christopher's unexpected death there was no obvious successor to the union throne. Before the end of the summer of 1448 Denmark had elected Christian I of Oldenburg and Sweden Karl Knutsson (Bonde) who both of them claimed Gotland and Norway.⁴⁸

From the start union considerations strongly influenced the policy of the Danish counsellors who looked forward to union negotiations over the election of a new king as stipulated in the Kalmar agreement of 1438. In Sweden the brothers Bengt and Nils Jönsson (Oxenstierna) were elected supervisors of the realm until a royal election could take place and further discussions on the succession were deferred to a broader meeting of the realm in Stockholm at midsummer, for which Karl Knutsson, who had royal aspirations, was preparing in Finland.

In Denmark the council strengthened its organisation by having officials of the realm take care of the government and issue documents in the name of the young Queen Dorothea. The question of her apanage was temporarily solved by letting the council function as her guardian. The counsellors did not wish to fulfil the provisions of the morning gift arrangement by handing over castles and land to the value of 15,000 Rhenish guilders from each kingdom without the participation of the other two kingdoms. In preparation for the expected Nordic election meeting the Danish council started looking for a princely

⁴⁸ For the conflict 1448–50, see J. E. Olesen, 'Die doppelte Königswahl 1448 im Norden', in W. Paravicini (ed.), *Mare Balticum; Beiträge zur Geschichte des Ostseeraums im Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Erich Hoffmann* (Sigmaringen, 1992), pp. 213–31; Olesen, *Rigsråd*, pp. 379–425; Olesen, *Unionskrige og Stændersamfund*, pp. 21–7; Enemark, *Krisear 1448–1451*; Albrechtsen, *Fællesskabet*, pp. 201–12.

successor to the childless Christopher who would be acceptable also in Norway and Sweden. Reinstating Erik of Pomerania hardly came into question and it seems that Duke Adolph was first offered the throne but declined, suggesting his nephew Count Christian of Oldenburg in his place.

In Sweden the lack of an obvious successor seems at first to have caused the two supervisors and their family group to search for a candidate from their own circle whom they could present at the scheduled Stockholm meeting. But Nils Jönsson's son, who may have been their candidate, was captured by Erik of Pomerania whose own claim seems to have been strengthened in the course of the spring of 1448 in the hope of regaining Gotland and preserving Norwegian support for the union. In the end he was also supported by the Oxenstiernas in order to prevent the election of Karl Knutsson. However, Karl made his appearance in Stockholm at the head of a large armed retinue and managed to win sufficient support for his election, in June, as king of Sweden in accordance with the rules of the Swedish Landlaw. Karl gained followers by promising advantages to counsellors and other magnates and by planning a military showdown over Gotland; his election can also be seen as a reaction against continued Danish influence in the union.

In Denmark it was the goal of the council to nominate a princely candidate who would also be acceptable as a spouse for Queen Dorothea, so that a common solution could be found to both the question of succession and the problem of the morning gift. Count Adolph brought Count Christian of Oldenburg with him to the negotiations over the succession in København in June–July where there was in the end a clear majority in favour of Christian's candidature. After Karl Knutsson's election in Sweden the Danish council saw no other solution than to elect Christian king of Denmark. In September he issued a letter of assurance to the council and was acclaimed king at the *landsting* of Viborg.

The election of the two kings in 1448 cannot be interpreted as the result of different political ideologies, such as unionism versus nationalism or *regimen regale* versus *regimen politicum*. The conflict seems primarily to have been a struggle between various groups of noblemen about power and influence in both Denmark and Sweden. The elections had, however, serious consequences for union relations. Only a few weeks after Karl Knutsson's election a Swedish army landed in Gotland in order to capture it from Erik of Pomerania. The attack was pressed home in spite of Danish protests and in December the Swedes succeeded in conquering the town of Visby, though Erik was able to hold on to the nearby Visborg Castle. He promised to cede the castle to the Swedish crown in exchange for Öland with Borgholm Castle, but before the

time stipulated a Danish relief expedition reached Gotland. Erik then let the Danes have Visborg in return for the promise of three Danish castles and an annual payment of 10,000 guilders, after which he returned to his ancestral duchy of Pomerania-Stolp.

Thus Gotland, with its key position in the Baltic, became the subject of an open conflict between Denmark and Sweden. In the spring of 1449 King Christian planned an expedition to Gotland and established a coalition of north German princes in support of his cause. The change in the military balance of power led Karl Knutsson to seek arbitration by the grand master of the Teutonic Order and the Hansa, but without result. After Christian arrived in Gotland with a fleet in July peace was concluded and the question of Gotland's status was referred to a meeting of Danish and Swedish counsellors in Halmstad in May 1450. It appears that Christian wanted to take military action against Karl Knutsson and did not fully agree with this arrangement.

In Norway Sigurd Jonsson became supervisor of the realm after King Christopher's death and it appears that a separate royal election was contemplated. Sigurd himself was considered a candidate together with Erik of Pomerania and the earl of Orkney but held back and seems to have given priority to the continuation of the union, as he had done before. In reality, the choice was between Christian of Oldenburg and Karl Knutsson. In this situation the counsellors of the realm and other politically influential persons split into two factions, traditionally called the Danish and the Swedish parties. Personal and family relations with the neighbouring kingdoms played a role but it should also be noted that most of the leading men of the Danish party, such as Sigurd Jonsson and the Danes Bishop Jens of Oslo and Hartvig Krummedike (who had a Norwegian wife), were among those who had supported Erik of Pomerania and his governmental system, while in the other party at least Archbishop Aslak Bolt represented the conciliar constitutionalism of the previous decade.

There were contacts between the Swedish party and Karl Knutsson as early as the summer of 1448 and in February 1449 some members of the council and other nobles declared openly in favour of Karl. From about the same time the majority of the council supported Christian of Oldenburg's claim. Backed by a regional meeting of burghers and rural representatives in Oslo they informed him in June that they would accept him as king, which they finally did in Marstrand in July in return for the first *håndfestning* of Norwegian history. In this the king presented himself as 'elected, taken and received' (*utkored; anameth oc vndfongeth*) while some of the counsellors present informed his subjects that they had 'taken' (*anammet*) him king as the nearest heir after Erik of Pomerania

and that he would be properly acclaimed king at a meeting of the realm in Trondheim next summer. In other words, it was still felt necessary to make the election appear to be in accordance with the law of hereditary succession.

In the meantime the supporters of Karl Knutsson had been actively working for his cause and had him elected king at *Frostathing* in Trøndelag in June 1449. In the autumn he entered Østlandet with a cavalry force, was elected king at Hamar, and went on to Trondheim. He was there crowned king by Archbishop Aslak in November, in return for a *håndfestning* modelled on that of Christian I but with a stronger emphasis on the elective principle and the freedoms and rights of the Church. After Christmas he returned to Østlandet with an army but was unable to capture Akershus from Hartvig Krummedike. Karl's failure to regain Gotland caused discontent in Sweden and at the Danish–Swedish Halmstad meeting in May 1450 the Swedish counsellors relinquished his claim to Norway, a decision that he reluctantly had to accept.

The way was now open for Christian's coronation in Trondheim at the beginning of August, after the Norwegian council declared Karl's election and coronation invalid and presented Christian as legally elected king. On his return journey he stopped in Bergen where the Danish and Norwegian counsellors drew up a treaty of permanent union between the two kingdoms.

The royal accession charters or *håndfestninger* of 1449 and the union treaty of 1450 were new departures in the constitutional history of Norway. The charters made far-reaching promises in the spirit of conciliar constitutionalism and for the first time clearly established Norway as an elective kingdom. This was further emphasised in the union treaty which stipulated that future royal elections would be conducted by the two councils in Halmstad (cf. Chapter 23).

In the Halmstad meeting in May 1450 representatives of the Hansa participated as mediators and it was the prospect of a Danish–Hanseatic coalition that persuaded the Swedish counsellors to accept Christian's claim to the Norwegian throne. The negotiations further resulted in a union and peace treaty between Denmark and Sweden, expressing the constitutional programme of the aristocracy. For the first time legally binding rules for the election of a king were formulated in order to avoid a repetition of the events of 1448. Christian I and Karl Knutsson were both acknowledged as kings but after the death of one of them efforts were to be made to have the other elected in his place or regents were to rule the kingless country until the other king died. One common king was then to be elected in Halmstad by twelve counsellors from each kingdom. Each kingdom was to keep its own privileges and former rights and be governed by native men. Most other provisions in the treaty were taken

from the undated draft of a union statute of 1436–8 and from the Kalmar treaty of 1438. No final decision was made in Halmstad about Gotland or other unresolved issues between the kingdoms. All such matters were referred to a meeting of the kings in June 1451.

The Halmstad and Bergen treaties of 1450 were never amalgamated into one union treaty but remained bilateral Danish–Swedish and Danish–Norwegian treaties. In contrast to what happened at the accession of King Christopher the Danes were able to prevent an agreement between Norway and Sweden to the detriment of Danish interests. As the Bergen treaty stipulated a permanent union under one king, with Christian I's successor to be elected in the first place from among his sons, Karl Knutsson and his descendants were barred from the Danish and Norwegian thrones while, according to the Halmstad treaty, they were not excluded from the Danish throne.

Christian I's struggle for Sweden

The Halmstad and Bergen treaties reflected the intention of the Nordic counsellors of the realms to keep the union of three kingdoms but they were only successful for short periods – 1457–63, 1497–1501 and 1520–23 – and then under changed conditions. While the two treaties tried to secure peace between the united kingdoms the future unions would be the results of partisan conflicts, warfare and the Danish king's superior power and zealous efforts to win and retain Sweden.

The Gotland problem was not solved at the meeting of the two kings in the summer of 1451. Negotiations were blocked by the Danish counsellors' demand that Queen Dorothea's morning gift in Sweden be handed back or 15,000 guilders paid in its place. Backed by the Danish council Christian I attacked Sweden in the autumn of 1451 and at a council meeting in November, attended by some Norwegian counsellors, extensive operations were planned for the following year. The former peaceful intentions of the Danish council thus gave way to Christian's war policy.⁴⁹

It was, however, Karl Knutsson who took the initiative by making a pre-emptive attack on Skåne and Blekinge early in 1452, counting on his naval power to prevent Christian's fleet from sailing to Stockholm. King Christian

49 For the following, see Olesen, *Unionskrige og Stændersamfund*; P. Enemark, 'Der Weg König Christians I zum schwedischen Thron', in D. Kattinger et al., *"huru thet war talet"*, pp. 271–300; Larsson, *Kalmarunionens tid*, pp. 265–338; L. Hamre, *Norsk historie 1450–1513* (Oslo, 1971); C. Paludan Müller, *De første konger af den oldenborgske slægt: Omrids og tanker* (København, 1874; repr. 1971), pp. 1–127.

nevertheless made headway in Västergötland and Småland and in June a Danish fleet was active in the Stockholm archipelago without achieving significant results. Swedish raids into Norway and the prospect of a war over that kingdom threatened Christian's position, and in January 1453 an armistice was arranged and negotiations were resumed – to the relief of the people of the border provinces who had suffered from the military operations. However, Sweden had been isolated from the west and the naval operations in the Stockholm archipelago had made the Danes aware of the possibility of blockading the commerce of Sweden and attacking its eastern coast from Gotland.

Christian continued to work for the re-establishment of the union under his own rule with the support of adherents in central and northern Sweden. In this he was helped by Karl Knutsson's attempts to oust his antagonists of the Oxenstierna and Vasa families who had played a major role in government under the reign of Christopher of Bavaria. It was in vain that Karl tried to establish alliances with Poland, the Teutonic Order and the Hansa. Christian's countermove was to renew the privileges of the Wendish Hansa towns in his kingdoms and then have Sweden blockaded; he had no intention of pursuing the negotiation policy of the Danish council. Karl tried without success to have the issues between the kings and kingdoms adjudicated by a court of counselors of the realms. He was under military pressure and his mobilisation for war required taxation of the common people and the recovery of crown lands and taxable estates. Early in 1457 Archbishop Jöns Bengtsson (Oxenstierna) raised the standard of rebellion against Karl who fled to Danzig whence he carried out an energetic propaganda campaign. Archbishop Jöns and the Danish-born Erik Axelsson (Thott) were appointed supervisors of the realm until a new king could be elected, the only choice being Christian whose fleet remained in the Stockholm archipelago.

In April 1457 Christian, answering a Swedish inquiry, expressed his willingness to govern constitutionally in compliance with the laws and privileges of Sweden. In June he was elected king in Stockholm after issuing an accession charter which detailed constitutional guarantees and confirmed previous agreements between the kingdoms with the exception of the Halmstad treaty of 1450, which was declared invalid. Controversial questions, such as Gotland's status and the customs dues collected at Bohus, were referred to the decision of the councils of the three kingdoms. Christian also succeeded in circumventing the Swedish constitutional demands concerning the allocation of castles and the conduct of government in the king's absence. The political situation seemed to favour a strong union monarchy.

The Oxenstiernas were more of an aristocratic-constitutional faction than a regular union party. The real adherents of the union were to be found among the border nobility for whom peace and connections across the frontiers were of greater importance than restricting the ruling power of the king. For exiled Swedish members of the border nobility Christian offered the only way they could return to their estates in Sweden.⁵⁰

In the first few years of Christian's Swedish reign the government of the kingdom seems to have worked harmoniously. The castles were administered by the Swedish high nobility with a leading role for the border nobility whose politico-military position had been strengthened by Christian's accession. The Swedish council confirmed the disputed document concerning Queen Dorothea's morning gift and Christian was by judicial decision awarded the landed property of Karl Knutsson.

The newly established union resembled in various respects the union of Christopher of Bavaria's reign. It was a personal union contracted by separate royal elections and coronations. The king was bound by an accession charter in each of the kingdoms and their independence was emphasised by separate administrations.

At a large meeting in Skara in 1458, in which counsellors from all three realms participated, the Norwegians designated Christian's eldest son, Hans, as his successor in Norway, to be followed by his direct descendants. This decision undermined the elective principle of the Bergen treaty of 1450 in favour of the traditional hereditary Norwegian succession. At the suggestion of the Norwegians even the Swedes were disposed to let the five-year-old Prince Hans succeed his father and not long after he was proclaimed heir apparent to the Swedish throne.

However, the renewed Nordic union was short-lived. Under the threat of Karl Knutsson's return the power of the Oxenstiernas in Sweden was increased by Christian at the beginning of 1463. But later in that year harsh extra taxation provoked protests from the commonalty in Uppland, Bergslagen and Dalarna, supported by Archbishop Jöns Bengtsson, which led to his imprisonment by the king. In January 1464 the Oxenstierna–Vasa coalition revolted and summoned Karl Knutsson back. His second period as king of Sweden lasted for only a few months. After the Oxenstiernas had again contacted Christian I and persuaded him to release the archbishop they pressed Karl to abdicate on favourable terms in January 1465, giving him Finnish *len* in return and allowing him to keep his royal title. The Oxenstiernas and Vasas were now supported by

50 Larsson, *Kalmarunionens tid*, pp. 287.

the border nobility and the council appointed Archbishop Jöns and Bishop Kettel Karlsson (Vasa) as supervisors of the realm. For the time being they did not arrange to have Christian called back to Sweden. The general public in Sweden had no real desire for a foreign king and large segments of the Swedish aristocracy had not taken part in the reaction against Karl Knutsson, which made it necessary to conduct a cautious policy. By taking over the castle of Stockholm the archbishop made it clear that he was master of the situation in relation to all parties, the population in general as well as Karl Knutsson and the followers of Christian I. His power at the head of the Oxenstierna–Vasa coalition was strengthened by Bishop Kettel's death in the summer of 1465.

In explaining the Swedish power struggle the categories *regimen regale* and *regimen politicum* no longer seem adequate. The Swedish aristocracy was divided into rival factions: the Oxenstiernas and Vasas vied with the Danish Thott family which had economic interests in Sweden as well as in Denmark, and then there were the followers of Karl Knutsson. The latter group agitated for a national Swedish monarchy against the union and had excellent connections with the Dalecarlians who since the days of Engelbrekt had shown themselves capable of mobilising a popular armed levy against a tax-demanding ruler. The rival factions in the council of the realm were challenged by groups in the towns and among the rural population.

King Christian realised that he would have to pursue a very cautious policy if he were to regain possession of Sweden. In this situation the counsellors who had taken a passive and unobtrusive position in the strife between Archbishop Jöns Bengtsson and Karl Knutsson took the initiative to open negotiations with the king. Rather than allowing the Oxenstiernas to strengthen their power they wanted to retain the union under King Christian's rule if only he would give them secure constitutional guarantees. In February 1466 this resulted in the so-called Jönköping Pact. The old connections between the three kingdoms were confirmed and a meeting of the councils of the three realms was to be held in Kalmar in July in order to secure the peace between the kingdoms.

Archbishop Jöns Bengtsson was in a difficult position. His delay in recalling King Christian, on account of the popular resentment of a foreign king, was in conflict with the border nobility's desire for a clarification of the succession. The greatest threat against his power was the rapprochement between Karl Knutsson and the Axelssons of the Thott family who possessed large and strategically placed *len*: Varberg in Halland (Åge Axelsson), Sölvesborg in Blekinge and Gotland (Iver Axelsson), Nyköping in Sweden and the best part of Finland (Erik Axelsson). Their *len* as well as their property and family relations made the Axelssons interested in the preservation of peace through a renewed union

under Christian's rule, but on the other hand they worked to increase their power in Sweden by approaching Karl Knutsson whose daughter Magdalena married Iver Axelsson in 1466. For Erik Axelsson, who had been appointed supervisor of the realm together with Archbishop Jöns Bengtsson in 1457, the political situation looked untenable. It appeared that Sweden risked both a civil war and a war with King Christian if the archbishop retained his position as regent.

Faced with the prospect of conflict with King Christian, Erik Axelsson and the border nobility, Archbishop Jöns Bengtsson found it safest to approach Christian, but his attempt to generate public opinion in favour of recalling the king was met by violent counter-propaganda from Karl Knutsson's followers, which caused unrest both in Dalarna and among the burghers of Stockholm. The internal conflicts in Sweden prevented the union negotiations in Kalmar in the summer of 1466 from producing results, but in connection with Iver Axelsson's and Magdalena Knutsdotter's wedding in Nyköping in October, where some of the Swedish counsellors were present, a preliminary peace agreement was made between the three kingdoms and another union meeting was planned in Kalmar next summer. The question of King Christian's election in Sweden was still kept in abeyance and the plans for a renewed confirmation of the union were made dependent on a settlement with Archbishop Jöns Bengtsson and his closest followers.

A coup at a subsequent meeting of the council of the realm in Stockholm removed Jöns Bengtsson from his position as supervisor of the realm and Erik Axelsson was elected in his place. Clearly, the majority of the counsellors regarded Erik as best able to stabilise the political situation and his appointment should be seen as a compromise until a new king could be elected. Erik Axelsson's efforts at mediation and his policy were challenged by Nils Sture (Natt och Dag) who mobilised the Dalecarlians in support of Karl's claim; he and his followers regarded Erik Axelsson's position as regent as merely a provisional measure and called into question the competence of the council of the realm to make decisions about the future of the kingdom. The Oxenstiernas and the Vasas began a counter-offensive to undermine Erik Axelsson's position and were eventually supported by King Christian. In reality the strife in Sweden was now between Nils Sture and Jöns Bengtsson and their respective followers. It was clear that Erik Axelsson and the majority of the counsellors had underestimated the popular demand for a native king, in sharp opposition to Christian's claim to be reinstated. Erik Axelsson and the Thott family were running the risk of being held responsible by both parties for an unsatisfactory political development.

The events of 1466 reinforced Christian's view that the Swedish throne could only be regained by military intervention. Consequently, rearmament was begun, *len* dues were increased, and the king repossessed mortgage *len*. To keep his hands free when turning against Sweden the king appointed his brother, Count Gerhard, governor in the duchies, and the Hansa towns were forbidden to trade with Sweden. Christian's financial measures were to the detriment of the Thott family and caused Iver Axelsson to break openly with the king in 1467.

The Axelssons had been supporters of Christian's bid for the union throne since 1448 but they and the king held divergent opinions about the way in which the union and Christian's Swedish throne could best be secured. While Christian wanted to take the kingdom by force the Axelssons, with their interests in both realms, pursued a policy of peace and negotiation, which in the end – because of its delaying tactics and approach to Karl Knutsson – led Christian to distrust them and strengthen his ties with the Oxenstiernas. As the strife hardened and dragged on the Axelssons were forced to take sides with Karl and it was this that made Karl's third period as king (1467–70) possible. He ruled, however, very much at the mercy of the Axelssons. At a meeting of magnates in 1468 Karl gave his son-in-law Iver Axelsson enlarged powers in Sweden and decided that on his own death Iver was to be supervisor of the realm until the council of the realm could elect a new king.

If the Axelssons had a specific political plan it must have been to work for an agreement between Christian and the Swedish council on the union question based on constitutional principles and maintaining the Thott family's dominant politico-economic position. Thus the breach between Christian and the Axelssons may be said to reflect a contrast between a monarchic and an aristocratic concept of the union.

Karl Knutsson's power depended on the Axelssons and their aristocratic followers and on the national aspirations of the Dalecarlians with which the burghers of Stockholm sympathised. In this situation Christian's obvious strategy, besides supporting the Oxenstiernas and Vasas, was to work towards separating the Axelssons from Karl Knutsson. An armistice with Iver Axelsson in the spring of 1468 was to be followed by a judicial decision by the Danish and the Swedish councils on his conflict with Christian. A meeting in Halmstad in July revealed fundamental differences between the counsellors of the two realms. The Swedes wanted a peace treaty until a new union meeting could be held while the Danes wanted guarantees to the effect that Iver Axelsson and Karl Knutsson would stick to the agreement about a new meeting and added far-reaching demands, two of which were that Queen Dorothea's morning

gift *len* be handed over and Gotland surrendered by Iver Axelsson, which the Swedes could not accept.

The armistice between the kingdoms came to an end and King Christian planned to force Sweden to submit by means of a commercial blockade involving the Hansa. Under the leadership of Lübeck the Hanseatic towns made great mediating efforts, but a meeting in Lübeck in the autumn of 1469 failed because of irreconcilable differences. The Danish representatives wanted a decision on the right to the Swedish throne but this was blocked by the Swedes who would not have the legitimacy of Karl Knutsson's kingship questioned and demanded that the status of Skåne and Gotland be treated as the first main point on the agenda.

A rebellion in Sweden towards the end of 1469, instigated by the Oxenstiernas and Vasas, gave King Christian new hope of taking possession of the kingdom. After a couple of months the rebels had made themselves masters of several provinces and threatened the rule of Karl Knutsson. At the beginning of 1470 Christian launched a campaign in Sweden but he soon returned to Denmark.

New possibilities arose for Christian when Karl Knutsson died in May 1470. The Swedish council was now divided into two factions. One, including the Axelssons, was led by Sten Sture, son of Karl's sister, whom Karl had appointed regent on his deathbed; this faction had the support of the Dalecarlians and the burghers of Stockholm. Sten Sture's chief opponents, who wanted Christian as king, belonged partly to the Oxenstierna–Vasa coalition and were partly linked with the border provinces. Sten Sture managed to gain the support of the majority of the counsellors and was elected supervisor of the realm in the latter part of May. With Erik Karlsson (Vasa) expelled from central Sweden peace was re-established for a while.

Christian could still count on the support of friends of the union in Sweden, among them the new archbishop Jakob Ulfsson, but as before he was inclined to use military force if a negotiated settlement could not be reached and started extensive preparations for war at the beginning of 1471, getting the Wendish Hansa towns to promise that they would stop their trade with Sweden. In April a delegation of Danish counsellors, sent by the king, met Sten Sture and other Swedish counsellors in Kungssäter in Västergötland and concluded an armistice which was to be followed by a meeting between Christian and the counsellors of the two realms at Stegeborg in the summer. The Danish counsellors desired a reconciliation between King Christian and the Axelssons in order to create a detente between the kingdoms. The Swedes wanted something else and more, namely a general agreement on the conditions before Christian's

election. They regarded the monarchy of Christopher of Bavaria as a political ideal and a model for the re-establishment of the union.

The Danish counsellors who worked for a reconciliation with the Axelssons did not regard that family as being against the reinstatement of the king, if only it was done on constitutional conditions and with the restoration of the brothers to their former position in Denmark. However, while the Danish council kept to its policy of peace and negotiations King Christian had no intention of making constitutional concessions to the Swedes and in his ratification of the Kungssäter agreement reduced the length of the armistice. The changes were not accepted by the Swedish counsellors who insisted on having a peace meeting arranged according to the original agreement; they were now increasingly suspicious of Christian who in the summer arrived with his fleet outside Stockholm.

It was still not entirely impossible to reach a negotiated solution and an armistice was arranged in early August to last until a meeting near Stockholm on 1 September could adjudicate on all the disputes between Christian and his opponents. Christian still avoided making clear his views on the character of the union and his relations with the Swedes, and managed to have the question about his right to the Swedish throne included among the matters that were to be decided judicially; such a judgement could hardly go against him as the court would be made up of counsellors from all three kingdoms. The Axelssons' demands on the king were not given a prominent position in the planned meeting but were placed among the claims which might be made from either side.

In short, Christian's plan was to avoid having his right to the throne linked with concessions about the form of the union. Consequently he evaded the demands put forward by Sten Sture and the Swedish negotiators in Kungssäter that a union treaty and *håndfæstning* be combined. His strategy is understandable in the light of the fact that he had support for his views among the Danish and Norwegian counsellors and that the majority of the Swedish counsellors, headed by Archbishop Jakob Ulfsson and the bishops, were disposed to negotiate a settlement.

The situation now looked threatening for the Stures and the Axelssons. It seemed that the regent and his party would not be able to make the Swedish council keep to their union programme but would be forced to accept an unfavourable agreement with King Christian; the meeting on 1 September was planned at such a short notice that it would be dominated by people from the Mälars provinces, notably Uppland, in which the Oxenstiernas were influential. If they were to prevent a victory for Christian and a return to power

of the Oxenstiernas and the Vasas the Stures had to make the Swedish council face manifest popular hostility to Christian. Moreover, it had to be made clear that the Swedish council did not have the right to make the final decision about the election of a king at the coming meeting in Stockholm but that a more broadly based assembly was needed with representatives of the estates from the various parts of the country.

In the rival propaganda campaigns Christian won the support of the common people of Uppland and Västmanland but Sten Sture attracted the largest following among the population as a whole. Early in September Sten Sture and his supporters issued a veritable declaration of war against Christian at a meeting in Vadstena in which people from the Göta provinces participated. The final outcome was the bloody battle of Brunkeberg, close to Stockholm, on 10 October 1471, ending in a decisive victory for Sten Sture which not only strengthened his position but also paralysed the union policy for some time. King Christian never again tried to conquer Sweden by force; he lacked adequate resources and also faced opposition from the Danish council.

The political chaos in Sweden in the 1460s and the battle of Brunkeberg reflect other contrasts in Swedish society than that between adherents of a strong royal power and those favouring conciliar government. The Oxenstiernas and the Vasas sided with King Christian in the battle, as did other magnates with Danish connections, together with the peasantry of Uppland. On the other side Sten Sture was supported not only by the Axelssons but also by the miners and peasants of Dalarna and the burghers of Stockholm, groups that now had to be taken into consideration, particularly as the party division permeated society as a whole. The factors in the power struggle had changed with increased possibility of alliances between the leaders and such groups of people.

Ever since the days of Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson the economic interests of the mine owners and peasants of Dalarna had clashed with those of the union king and they had supported the constitutional union programme of the conciliar aristocracy. For both parties the goal had been to achieve more favourable conditions within the union. This community of interests had now come to an end. This was partly because Karl Knutsson's agitation in pamphlets and the so-called *Karlskrönikan* (Karl's Chronicle) had led supporters of the popular movement to blame adverse conditions in Sweden on the union so that Danes and foreign kings came to be regarded as oppressors of the Swedish people. The popular movement acquired a clearly national character in contrast to the policies of the Oxenstiernas and the Axelssons who were not against a union in which their own politico-economic interests were safeguarded.

The battle of Brunkeberg was not a national showdown between Swedes and Danes; nevertheless it was soon interpreted in that way. Sten Sture called the battle a victory over the enemies of the kingdom. It brought into power a group which did not necessarily regard the union as its goal and established the rule of the Stures which would eventually be continued by the national monarchy of the Vasa kings. Thus, the battle signalled an end to both Queen Margrethe's and Erik of Pomerania's centralised union monarchy and the aristocratic federation of the three Nordic kingdoms.

However, the union still had prominent supporters in the Swedish council, mainly among the border nobility. Negotiations were renewed and in July 1472 resulted in an extensive agreement of peace and cooperation between King Christian and all the three kingdoms and their peoples which reflected the Nordic counsellors' ambition to re-establish the union later. Some of the decisions made about joint action in case of war, the protection of trade, and other interests spanning the national borders confirmed provisions of former union treaties, and came to form the basis for the future relations between the kingdoms. The Axelssons recovered their private estates but they did not regain their *len* in Denmark. Neither the Axelssons nor the Swedish council excluded the possibility that Christian might become king of Sweden. A judicial court made up of Nordic counsellors of the realms was to adjudicate all unsolved issues at a meeting in Kalmar the following year.

The Kalmar meeting of 1473 concentrated on King Christian's relations with the Axelssons but fruitless negotiations were also carried out concerning the conditions for his recovery of the Swedish throne. A Swedish demand for adjudication on the status of Gotland and the east Danish provinces was a countermove that blocked a solution of the succession question and caused legal proceedings to be postponed until the summer of 1474.

Christian hoped to be able to regain the Swedish throne without adjudication and the prospects of a reconciliation between him and the Axelssons posed a threat to the firm constitutional line held by Sten Sture and the Swedish council against the king and the Danish–Norwegian counsellors. As a countermove to Christian's claim they appear to have persisted in their demand for the east Danish provinces and, moreover, required the king to pay his debts to his Swedish creditors.

The union meeting in Kalmar in 1476 was presented with a Swedish draft of a new union treaty which laid down the terms for King Christian's election as king of Sweden in great detail, in an aristocratic-constitutional spirit it aimed to restrict royal power. The Swedish demand for a legal adjudication of Christian's right to the Swedish throne now gave way to negotiations about

the conditions for his acceptance in Sweden. The draft also tried to legitimise the earlier conflict with the king and involved the councils of Denmark and Norway as guarantors for Christian's observance of Sweden's constitutional rights. Furthermore, in return for accepting Christian the Swedish counsellors demanded a Danish–Norwegian guarantee that the question of Gotland would be adjudicated by a union court of justice. This was in conflict with Danish interests and contributed to the outcome that the final decision was to rest with the king, as in principle all agreed that before long he would be king of Sweden.

Though King Christian accepted many of the Swedish demands he was not really disposed to accept the constitutional requirements. He made a thorough revision of the draft and presented his conditions for taking over the government of Sweden, deleting or radically changing some of the more essential decisions of the Kalmar draft with regard to both *len* policy and future royal elections. On the latter question he wanted to pave the way for hereditary kingship and he still hoped to prevent a union treaty being linked to a *håndfæstning*.

The Swedish council, including Sten Sture, had in Kalmar committed themselves to seek the acceptance of Christian I as king of Sweden by the estates, which according to the Landlaw was a necessary condition for a valid election. At a meeting of the realm in 1477 the commonalty rejected Christian. According to the Lübeck Chronicle the Swedes withdrew their oath of allegiance from the king because of his many breaches of faith with them and also because he was neither willing nor able to pay his Swedish debts.

King Christian could do little else than accept the status quo. In order to emphasise his pacific intentions and strengthen the desire for a judicial decision of all unresolved issues between him and the Swedes, especially the Axelssons, he had the Danish council of the realm issue a statement testifying to his willingness to conclude the conflict with Sweden. After the disappointing Swedish decision this was a question that would now have to wait.

In Denmark and Norway Christian I's government was to a large extent marked by his efforts to keep Sweden in the union but the results of the high priority given to union policy were different in the two other kingdoms. In Denmark it led to the king's long-standing cooperation with a small group of families of the high nobility whereas Norway was left very much to itself.

In spite of varying internal coalitions the Danish council largely supported the king's union policy and he had the Danish high nobility behind him until the breach with the Axelssons in 1466–7. In return the king respected the promises in his accession charter that the council should consent to declarations of war,

levying of taxes, allocation and mortgaging of *len*, and that foreigners were not to be granted *len* or be members of the council. The council aristocracy retained its dominance of the *len* system, to which the strained finances caused by the wars in Sweden and Christian's election as duke and sovereign ruler of Schleswig and Holstein in 1460 contributed. Extra taxation, mortgaging of *len* and raising of the rates for those that were already mortgaged increased the king's dependence on the counsellors who were to provide the loans and grant the taxes. It was not until the breach with the Axelssons that a reorganisation of the *len* system brought with it an increase of the royal revenues. Castles were now granted to men of lower social standing as well as to loyal members of the high nobility. From the mid-1470s an increase in the redemption of mortgaged *len* heralded a reorganisation of the *len* administration and an improvement of the royal finances that was made possible by the cessation of the war policy. The king's showdown with the Thott family opened the way for the recruitment of new council members, often the king's loyal officials from the middle layers of the nobility.⁵¹

According to King Christian's Norwegian *håndfestning* and the Bergen treaty of 1450, Norway's position within the union was that of an independent kingdom, governed according to Norwegian law in cooperation between the king and the council. This cooperation was made difficult by the fact that the king almost never visited the country, which led to a central København-based chancellery government in which certain governmental functions which normally belonged to the king were entrusted to the Norwegian counsellors. The council had little part in important political decisions concerning Norwegian interests; it was ignored in 1468–9 when King Christian pledged Orkney and Shetland to the Scottish crown for his daughter's dowry in her marriage to the later King James III. At the castle of Bergenhus the king replaced the active captain Olaf Nilsson after pressure from the Hansa on which he was financially and politically dependent. Olaf was subsequently killed by the Germans in 1455.⁵²

The real positions of power in Norway were not seats in the council but the captaincies of the three most important castles, Bergenhus, Akershus and Bohus. As captain of Akershus the Dane Hartvig Krummedike, who married into the Norwegian nobility, was the king's favourite and the most powerful man in the kingdom. A Danish nobleman was put in charge of the

51 H. Christensen, *Len og magt i Danmark 1439–1481*, *Skrifter udgivet af Jysk Selskab for Historie*, 42 (Aarhus, 1983); Olesen, *Unionskrige og stændersamfund*, pp. 243–8.

52 Hamre, *Norsk historie*; T. Riis, *Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot... Scottish-Danish Relations c. 1450–1707*, 1 (Odense, 1988), pp. 17–19, 245–56.

strategically placed Bohus, one of several breaches of Christian's *håndfestning*. However, the position of the Norwegian church was strengthened under its able leader, Archbishop Olaf Trondsson, and in the 1470s there were also tendencies towards a more active and independent council policy in relation to the Hansa.

King Hans and the union

When King Christian died in May 1481 all three kingdoms as well as the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein had recognised his son Hans as future ruler. Consequently, the negotiations which then followed did not include any discussion of the succession but were rather concerned with what Hans was to succeed to, as well as how and when. The reincorporation of Sweden in the union was the goal of both the royal house and the Danish council, which explains the delay in making decisions.⁵³

In Norway the council took over the government and demanded improvements in the conduct of government as a condition for renewing the union. The counsellors were dissatisfied with the pledging of Orkney and Shetland, with the Hamburgers' trade with Iceland in conflict with Bergen's staple monopoly, and with the fact that the late king had taken the revenues of the kingdom out of the country. The goal of the council was to realise the equal status of Norway within the union on a constitutional basis.

In Sweden Sten Sture had strengthened his position as regent in the 1470s. The constitutional programme of the council was still a real alternative to the centralised rule that the regent was developing and there was a power struggle between the regent, the Axelssons, and the council. The Danish council contacted the Axelssons and their supporters in order to get union negotiations under way.

Immediately after Christian I's death a Danish initiative to hold a Nordic council meeting on the basis of the union treaties of 1450 failed. In early 1482 the Norwegians made an agreement with the Swedes in order to safeguard their common interests, demanding from the Danes that Bohus be placed at the

53 For the following, see J. E. Olesen, 'Det danske rigsråd, kong Hans og Kalmarunionen 1481–1483', in *Struktur og funktion: Festskrift til Erling Ladewig Petersen* (Odense, 1994), pp. 27–47; Albrechtsen, *Fællesskabet*, pp. 247–75; Hamre, *Norsk historie*, pp. 96–236; E. Ladewig Petersen, 'Monarchy and nobility in Norway in the period around 1500', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 7 (1974), pp. 126–25; G. T. Westin, *Riksföreståndaren och makten: Politiska utvecklingslinjer i Sverige 1512–1517* (Uppsala, 1957); R. Stensson, *Peder Jakobsson Sunnanväder och maktkampen i Sverige 1504–1527* (Uppsala, 1947); Paludan Müller, *De første konger*, pp. 128–282.

Norwegian council's disposal before negotiations about an accession charter could begin. The Danish policy was now to break up the Swedish–Norwegian rapprochement by means of separate negotiations with the councils of the two kingdoms.

The efforts to re-establish the union of the three kingdoms did not succeed. The Norwegians did not attend the scheduled election meeting in Kalmar in the summer of 1482, possibly because their demands in connection with Bohus had not been met. Another election meeting was scheduled in Halmstad in January 1483. The Swedes, however, were not ready to accept Prince Hans and wanted to have the meeting postponed, but were not able to prevent King Hans' Danish–Norwegian *håndfæstning*, the so-called Halmstad Recess, which was based on the union programme drawn up by the Danish and Swedish counsellors at the Kalmar meeting of 1482. This programme was also the basis for the Swedish conditions for accepting Hans as king. It increased the restrictions on royal power and at the same time safeguarded the social and economic interests of the nobility and clergy (see Chapter 23). In its general provisions and some special articles the Halmstad Recess also included Sweden and it contained a number of special Norwegian demands reflecting the dissatisfaction with the government of Christian I.⁵⁴

The Recess paved the way for Hans' coronations in Denmark and Norway. The Swedish situation, on the other hand, was confused as the Swedes vacillated over the renewal of the union, a reflection of disunity in the council and the strife between Sten Sture and the Axelssons. The Swedish counsellors set forth their conditions for accepting Hans in the Kalmar Recess of September 1483 but his election was delayed. In 1484 negotiations broke down over the Swedish demand that an adjudication of the status of Gotland would have to precede the election. The Gotland question was solved when in 1487 King Hans came to the island and made Iver Axelsson surrender the castle of Visborg and retire to his estates in Skåne.

King Hans strengthened the royal power in Denmark and Norway to the detriment of aristocratic interests by expanding the chancellery's responsibilities, reducing the nobility's control of crown estates, and in other ways. Even the Church became in some sense the king's instrument with papal consent in consideration of the ecclesiastical representation in the councils and in order to have the salaries of legally trained officials paid from church funds (cf. Chapter 22). Step by step the king consolidated the joint Danish–Norwegian monarchy at the same time as he was eroding the power of the institutions

54 G. Carlsson, *Kalmar Reces 1483* (*Historiskt Arkiv*, 3, Stockholm, 1955).

of the separate realms. Norway was in reality governed through the Danish chancellery without having its own financial system and King Hans made his power felt in Schleswig and Holstein as well, continuing their personal union with Denmark.

Though the conditions for the acceptance of Hans as king of Sweden had been determined by the Kalmar Recess of 1483 Sten Sture succeeded in preventing his takeover of the government for many years. As supervisor of the realm he built up his own power, for example by increasing the number of his own *len* at the cost of former allies, including the Axelssons. Erik Axelsson lost his Finnish *len*, and with Iver Axelsson's fall and the transfer of Gotland to Denmark in 1487, the family lost its independent position in Nordic politics. There were, however, circles in the Swedish council, led by Archbishop Jakob Ulfsson and Svante Nilsson (Sture), who regarded Sten Sture's acquisition of power with distrust; they preferred the Nordic conciliar policy of former decades, based on the internal autonomy of equal kingdoms.⁵⁵

For many years King Hans tried to achieve a solution by negotiation but in the 1490s he seems to have lost faith in this method and adopted an offensive alliance and war policy. In 1493 he allied himself with Grand Duke Ivan III of Moscow who wanted the part of Karelia which Novgorod had ceded to Sweden under the treaty of Nöteborg in 1323 and promised Hans Russian support against Sten Sture. When Russian forces attacked across the border in 1495–6 and laid siege to the castle of Viborg Sten Sture had to attend to the defence of Finland. The defence of the eastern border had earlier been carried out most efficiently by Erik Axelsson who had built the castle of Olofsborg (Olavinlinna) at great cost.⁵⁶

The union supporters among the Swedish counsellors utilised the Danish–Russian treaty to exert pressure on Sten Sture in order to reopen negotiations over Sweden's acceptance of the union but he was not willing to retire. In Finland the army succeeded in containing the Russian attack, though at great cost, and a peace treaty was concluded for six years to be effective from March 1497. In Sweden Sten Sture allied himself with the lower estates against his opponents in the council who were led by Archbishop Jakob Ulfsson and Svante Nilsson, and in 1497 the conflict developed into open war. King Hans now intervened with armed forces from Denmark and Norway together with German mercenaries.

55 For the political situation in Sweden during King Hans' reign, see Enemark, *Fra Kalmar-brev til Stockholms blodbad*, pp. 99–124; Larsson, *Kalmarunionens tid*, pp. 375–415.

56 A. P. Palola, 'Finnlands Stellung in der Kalmarer Union', in D. Kattinger et al., "*huru thet war talet*", pp. 339–40.

In July 1497 Sten Sture's Dalecarlians suffered defeat and he was himself bottled up in the castle of Stockholm. After negotiations with King Hans he retired from his position as supervisor of the realm, receiving as compensation Nyköping and all of Finland as his *len*. King Hans confirmed the Kalmar Recess and was then crowned king of Sweden. For the next four years the Nordic union of three kingdoms was re-established.

When King Hans suffered serious defeat in his campaign against the German principality of Ditmarschen in 1500⁵⁷ the Swedish opposition to the union made renewed progress. The fight against the union king was led by Sten Sture who was reconciled with Svante Nilsson. Another leader was the designated bishop of Linköping, Hemming Gadh, and the Norwegian magnate Knut Alvsson also joined this group. At a meeting of the council in 1501 complaints were made against the king's use of foreign bailiffs and illegal taxation and also his alleged promise to cede parts of eastern Finland to the Russians. Hard on the heels of that came a letter from the rebellious magnates withdrawing their allegiance, and the greater part of Sweden was lost to King Hans. When Stockholm surrendered in 1502 the king only had Kalmar and Borgholm left, which Denmark's naval superiority made it possible to supply by sea.

For the remainder of King Hans' reign there were two marked attitudes to the union in Sweden. After Sten Sture's death in 1503 its opponents were led by the new supervisor of the realm, Svante Nilsson, and Hemming Gadh, supported by the common people of Dalarna and the burghers of Stockholm. Against them were ranged the union supporters on the council who wanted a reconciliation with King Hans. Swedish patriotism clashed with King Hans' policy and his demands for a judicial decision. At a union meeting in 1505, from which the Swedish counsellors were absent, King Hans had the Danish and Norwegian counsellors declare him rightful king of Sweden, a judgement which received the support of the emperor and enabled Hans to exert pressure on Lübeck in 1509 in order to effect a blockade of Sweden. The Swedish counsellors now felt forced to make an agreement which granted King Hans a large annual sum from Sweden if he were not accepted as king. The peace that was then made in København implied a formal acknowledgement of Hans' right to the Swedish throne.⁵⁸

As the understanding between Denmark and Lübeck was only of short duration the Swedish council was able to avoid ratifying the treaty. In 1510

57 W. Lammers, *Die Schlacht bei Hemmingstedt: Freies Bauerntum und Fürstenmacht im Nordseeraum* (3rd edn, Heide, 1987).

58 G. Olsson, 'Freden i Köpenhamn 1509', in *Studier tillägnade Curt Weibull den 19 augusti 1946* (Göteborg, 1946), pp. 313–35.

war broke out between Denmark and the Wendish Hansa towns which allied themselves with Sweden. In the final analysis, the war was about Lübeck's commercial hegemony in Scandinavia which King Hans had opposed for many years. The king now lost the last of his Swedish bases, but when peace was concluded in Malmö in 1512 the Hansa towns agreed to pay war reparations and the Swedish negotiators acknowledged the treaty of 1509 allowing Hans' right to the Swedish throne. However, in reality the three kingdoms' union was destined to be merely a short interlude in Hans' reign.

The struggle between Denmark and Sweden in King Hans' days also involved Norway. The Swedish rebellion in 1501 created for the first time since 1448–9 uncertainty about the kingdom's place among the Nordic countries. Norwegian efforts to associate with Sweden rather than Denmark emanated especially from Knut Alvsson of the Swedish aristocratic family Three Roses who owned estates in both Sweden and Norway. He succeeded in mobilising the Norwegian commonalty while the Norwegian council remained inactive. In the winter of 1501–2 he laid siege to Bohus and captured Akershus and Tønsberghus.

Under these circumstances the future of the Danish–Norwegian union depended on the military situation. King Hans was not disposed to show indulgence and did not have a mind to give up Norway. In the summer of 1502 the heir apparent Prince Christian, the later Christian II, was sent to Norway where he relieved Bohus and succeeded in having the siege raised. In the same summer Henrik Krummedike, who had held Bohus, sailed north in order to capture Akershus. Knut Alvsson was granted a safe-conduct for negotiations but was killed on board Henrik Krummedike's ship. Knut was then convicted posthumously of treason and of having broken the terms of the safe-conduct himself. It appears that this judgement had King Hans' approval as did the almost contemporary conviction of the Danish seneschal (*rigshofmester*) Poul Laxmand.⁵⁹

The killing of Knut Alvsson and the failure of the Norwegian rebellion meant that King Hans re-established his control of Norway. This was the beginning of a period in which Norwegian prelates and magnates in high positions were pushed aside in favour of servants of the Danish king. King Hans considered that the best way to safeguard the union of Denmark and Norway was to delegate his royal power to his son and in 1506 the king-elect, Christian, was sent to Norway as viceroy. The young prince took over all of King Hans'

59 Hamre, *Norsk historie*, pp. 160–93; H. Bruun, *Poul Laxmand og Birger Gunnersen: Studier over dansk politik i årene omkring 1500* (København, 1959; repr. Viborg, 1975).

governmental functions with no limitations whatsoever. King Hans and his chancellery in København stopped handling Norwegian affairs and Denmark and Norway were governed in parallel.⁶⁰

Christian II and the struggle for Sweden

When King Hans died in March 1513 Prince Christian was ready to take over the government. He had been acknowledged in all three kingdoms and commanded the castles of Denmark and Norway. There were, however, forces in Sweden who wanted to elect a native king. Rumours were also circulated to the effect that not all the counsellors from Jylland were ready to render homage to Christian but rather preferred Duke Frederik, the late king's brother who, however, declined the offer.

In the summer of 1513 counsellors from all three kingdoms convened in København to discuss the renewal of the union in accordance with the acknowledgement of King Hans' rights made by the Swedes the year before. However, the Swedes had no mandate to negotiate as Svante Nilsson had died and been succeeded as supervisor of the realm by his son, Sten Sture the Younger. This meant that the enemies of the union once more had the upper hand and that the union question had to be postponed. The younger Sten Sture aimed at building up a strong central power in Sweden and solicited support from the lower estates against the members of the high nobility in the council.⁶¹

The negotiations in København then came to deal with Christian II's *håndfæstning*, common for Denmark and Norway as though they were one country. It was confirmed in July 1513 by the king on the one side and the Danish and Norwegian counsellors on the other. The Danish aristocracy retained the political rights obtained in the Halmstad Recess of 1483 and the privileges of the nobility and clergy were vastly improved. As for Danish–Norwegian relations, the main interest of the Danish aristocracy seems to have been to have Norway's status as an elective kingdom settled. They were not interested in hereditary succession in Norway which might weaken the Danish election.

Christian II, on his part, aimed at saving as much as possible of his political freedom of action. The complex of rules which had been written into

⁶⁰ Hamre, *Norsk historie*, pp. 194–236.

⁶¹ For the following, see especially L. Hamre, *Norsk politisk historie 1513–1537* (Oslo, 1999); G. Wieselgren, *Sten Sture d.y. och Gustaf Trolle* (Lund, 1949); S. U. Palme, *Riksföreståndarvalet 1512: Studier i nordisk politik och svensk statsrätt 1470–1523* (Uppsala, 1949); L. Wie Andersen et al., *Uppsala-overenskomsten 1520: Magtstruktur og magtkamp i Sverige januar–oktober 1520* (Odense, 1975); Paludan Müller, *De første konger*, pp. 283–467.

the Halmstad Recess as a consequence of the union problems remained unchallenged with a few minor exceptions to the advantage of the monarchy. The stipulation that *len* should be allocated with the advice of counsellors from the parts of the country where they were situated was thus deleted from Christian's *håndfæstning*, but it was still maintained that the castellans' letters of obligations should be directed to the council of the realm after the king's death and that the king was not allowed to designate his successor in his own lifetime. The well-known rebellion paragraph was kept unchanged but whether it really gave the people the right of rising against the king if he would not let himself be instructed, is a moot point. When the *håndfæstning* had been issued Christian's coronation followed in København and then in Oslo.⁶²

In Sweden opposition to the Sture party in the council was strengthened when the old Archbishop Jacob Ulfsson resigned in 1514 and was succeeded by Gustaf Trolle, son of Erik Trolle who had served as supervisor for a short while in 1512 but had not been able to hold on to this assignment in the face of Sten Sture the Younger. A violent conflict between the new archbishop and Sten Sture followed (cf Chapters 22 and 23); like the conflicts of Jöns Bengtsson and Jakob Ulfsson with previous Swedish regents it was concerned with the relations between the council and the supervisor as the king's deputy. Sten Sture demanded that the archbishop abandon his power base, the episcopal castle Almarästaket on Lake Mälaren. He regarded the archbishop's castle building as an unlawful appropriation of the Crown's *len* and rights while Gustaf Trolle asserted the Church's independence from royal power. When Sten Sture laid siege to the castle the archbishop asked assistance from Christian II who was quick to comply, eager as he was to put an end to Sten Sture's delaying policy on the union question.

This conflict illuminates the problem of constitutionalism in Swedish internal politics. The confrontations occurred, as in Denmark under Hans and Christian II, within the framework of the existing aristocratic power structure using the means available in the constitutional system but the rival ideological or politico-theoretical views were more prominent, possibly in imitation of European ecclesiastical and princely politics. At the same time propaganda and agitation directed at the population in general became a crucially important means of gaining power, especially for Sten Sture who in relation to the council could always play on the real or alleged prospects of rebellion threatened by meetings of estates or regional assemblies all over the country, especially in

62 See also K. Hørby, 'Tiden fra 1340 til 1536', in Christensen et al. (eds.), *Danmarks historie*, 2 (København, 1980), pp. 236–8.

Dalarna and Bergslagen. As regent he greatly reduced the number of *len* in the hands of his opponents while he himself disposed quite freely of smaller *len* in favour of lesser noblemen who were loyal to him. Ideologically, Sten Sture came to maintain that the archbishop's absence from council meetings amounted to contempt for the Crown and that Gustaf Trolle's refusal to take his counsellor's oath was a violation of Swedish law.

A Danish naval attack on Stockholm in 1517 intensified the power struggle between regent and archbishop; the latter had Danish kinsmen and was suspected of preparing for the acceptance of Christian in Sweden. However, the Danish fleet withdrew when the troops it landed suffered defeat. In November 1517 Sten Sture won a majority in the council to institute judicial proceedings against the archbishop. The regent made sure that he had the consent of the estates and a declaration was issued to the effect that Gustaf Trolle had been deposed; it was also decided to demolish the castle of Almarästaket. The archbishop was imprisoned and forced to send a letter of resignation to Sten Sture; he also confirmed his resignation to the papal legate Johannes Arcimboldus who was in Scandinavia at the time. Sten Sture wanted the legate to take over the Swedish archbishopric but this was opposed by Christian II who cooperated closely with Gustaf Trolle from the summer of 1519 at the latest. Gustaf Trolle complained about Arcimboldus to the pope and Christian tried to imprison him on his return journey through Denmark. He was, however, later acquitted in the curia.

In 1518 Christian II went to Sweden with more ships and an increased number of German mercenaries, but when he was defeated outside Stockholm an armistice was concluded for two years. The king then prepared for the decisive confrontation using all the resources of the Danish–Norwegian monarchy. The Sound dues were increased and the populations of Denmark and Norway exposed to harsh extra taxation. In 1519–20 the king also obtained large cash loans on the money market in Kiel and at the same time a one-year agreement was made with Lübeck which in return for certain promises refrained from trading with Sweden and supporting Sten Sture.

In addition to his title to the Swedish throne Christian also had, from the turn of the year 1519–20, a papal mandate as executor of the punishment meted out by the Church on those who had used violence against the Swedish archbishop and other prelates. His demand for an unconditional acceptance in Sweden was above all based on the Stockholm agreements of 1497 and 1499 when the young Prince Christian had not only been designated as heir apparent to the throne, as he had been in Denmark and Norway, but had also acquired the right to receive the castellans' letters of obligations when his father died.

Shortly after New Year 1520 an army of German and Scottish mercenaries invaded Västergötland and met Sten Sture's forces on the frozen lake Åsunden near Bogesund. The young regent was fatally wounded and died in early February, after which the fight was carried on by his widow. She took over the leadership of the Sture party and headed the actions against the Danes and their Swedish allies, especially against the possessions of the archbishopric and the sees of Linköping, Västerås and Strängnäs.

The Danish attack and Sten Sture's death improved the position of the union supporters in the Swedish council, led by Gustaf Trolle, and at the beginning of March they made an agreement in Uppsala with the Danish army leaders, promising amnesty for former differences provided that the Swedes accepted the agreement and gave their allegiance to the king. In return King Christian promised to respect the laws and legal customs of Sweden and to rule in accordance 'with advice of the council'. All former agreements made in Kalmar or elsewhere were to remain in force or be improved and the castellans' letters of obligations were to be directed to both Crown and council. Finally, the agreement included a number of provisions for the future government of Sweden which re-established the Kalmar Recess as the basis of government. As a concession to Gustaf Trolle the amnesty promised by Christian II at first excluded crimes against the Church.

The Uppsala agreement aimed both at a showdown with the authoritarian government of the regent and a return to the constitutional programme of the Kalmar Recess. The former merely theoretical right of the council to adjust the constitution according to current needs was now made real. The constitutional, ideological and political significance of the agreement was that it repudiated Sten Sture's infringements as regent and at the same time abolished the special powers obtained by the monarchy in the Stockholm settlements of 1497–9. However, the agreement did not satisfy the ambitions of Christian II who in the autumn disregarded it by imposing hereditary succession in spite of massive opposition in the Swedish council.⁶³

In the summer of 1520 the Danish army brought more and more of Sweden under its control and in the late summer only Stockholm was left, defended by Sten Sture's widow. Christian II then arrived with a fleet to complete a military victory over Sweden that was never to be repeated. His success appears to have reduced his dependence on the archbishop and in his letter of assurance to the widow and her followers on the surrender of Stockholm in September his promise of amnesty included infringements or attacks against

63 Andersen et al., *Uppsala-overenskomsten*.

the Church. In order to obtain the surrender of Stockholm the archbishop had to give in and there can be little doubt that he and the other prelates were beginning to lose influence as a settlement by ecclesiastical adjudication and the use of church sanctions against their opponents with secular support was prevented.

In spite of its limited possibilities of political manoeuvring the Swedish council in September–October made persistent but futile efforts to prevent the advance of royal absolutism and the breakdown of the Uppsala treaty. It tried actively to retain its share in the right to receive the castellans' letters of obligations and its right to rebuke, on behalf of the Crown, a royal castellan for his injustices but step by step had to give way. It had to accept the king's demand that on his death the castle of Stockholm was to be held at his son's disposal and at the queen's disposal after him. By means of legal subtleties the king intervened in the council's deliberations and obtained an act of fealty and homage as hereditary king on 31 October. The next day he had himself acclaimed king on Brunkeberg in revenge for the defeat suffered there by his grandfather, Christian I. His coronation by Archbishop Gustaf Trolle on 4 November was performed on the basis of hereditary right and not, as the Swedish council had planned, on the elective principle. The hereditary character of the monarchy remained a cardinal point for Christian II as long as he lived.

Four days after the coronation occurred the event which has cast a dark shadow over Christian II's reign and had fatal consequences for the relations between the Danish and Swedish kingdoms, namely the Stockholm Massacre. Its antecedents are hard to establish and explain and it has remained a classical issue in Nordic historical research ever since.⁶⁴

At some time during the coronation festivities the gates of Stockholm Castle were closed. On 7 November in the large hall King Christian, the council of the realm, and many of the guests heard Archbishop Gustaf Trolle read an indictment of the late Sten Sture and his widow, certain named noblemen and clerics, some burghers of Stockholm, all those who had taken part in the demolition of his castle Almarästaket, and those who had him thrown into prison for two years and had encroached on the rights of Uppsala Cathedral and of other clerics and church institutions. The archbishop declared them all manifest heretics with whom no one could be reconciled, and requested that the king have them arrested and punished for their unchristian conduct.

⁶⁴ For an overview of the scholarly research, see Enemark, *Fra Kalmarbrev*, pp. 136–42; Hørby, 'Tiden fra 1340 til 1536', pp. 250–5.

The next day Gustaf Trolle and thirteen other churchmen issued a document which declared the accused persons to be open heretics, not only according to the laws of the Church but also to the laws of the emperor and Sweden. Mass executions followed: close on one hundred people were beheaded on Stortorget ('the large market place'), among them two bishops, some secular counsellors of the realm, and a number of nobles and prominent Stockholm citizens.

The motives behind the bloodbath are obscure. It seems clear, though, that the judicial proceedings against eighteen named persons, above all against Sten Sture the Younger, was 'a legal disguise' devised to punish Gustaf Trolle's opponents in spite of the solemn royal promise of complete amnesty. The accusation of heresy was intended to justify breaking the promise of amnesty and sentencing the accused people to death.⁶⁵

The judicial process indicates an alliance between the king, the archbishop, and other bishops who were all in favour of taking a hard line. In order to win back their political influence these counsellors appear for a while to have suspended their constitutional views in order to gain the king's cooperation in eliminating his and their opponents. The executions hit the Sture party hard but the fact that many others were executed suggests that the conflicting interests of the king and the bishops were reflected in the selection of victims. In the last instance the responsibility rests heavily on the shoulders of Christian II who could have prevented the executions. In his efforts to strengthen his power position the king seems to have consciously exploited the old divisions in the Swedish council of the realm.

As a consequence of the executions in Stockholm Gustaf Vasa was able to liberate Sweden from the union which, in his propaganda, was painted in the most garish colours. He carried on the political ambition of a national monarchy, going back to Karl Knutsson's days and continued by the Sture party. After escaping from imprisonment in Denmark he arrived back in Sweden via Lübeck in the spring of 1520. In January 1521 the Dalecarlians elected him their captain and soon afterwards large sections of Sweden closed ranks behind him, including the council aristocracy. In August 1521 he was elected supervisor of the realm. The governing council appointed by Christian II was unable to maintain control of the country. From late summer 1522 Gustaf Vasa received the support of the Hansa and with the assistance of its strong naval forces he was able to capture the coastal castles, which were still loyal to Christian, in

65 N. Skyum-Nielsen, *Blodbadet i Stockholm og dets juridiske maskering* (København, 1964).

the summer of 1523. This was after the council of the realm had elected him king in June 1523. The same year saw the Danish rebellion against Christian II and his deposition, and further efforts to renew the union were not possible in view of Denmark's severely strained resources.⁶⁶

With the events of 1522–3 the late medieval epoch of a union between all three Nordic kingdoms finally ended. Sweden had definitely chosen to follow its own national course. On the other hand, Denmark and Norway remained united for centuries, and actually became parties to another form of three-state union, namely the Oldenburg system which was established in 1460 and consisted of both the Danish–Norwegian union and the personal union between Denmark and the inter-connected duchies of Schleswig and Holstein.

⁶⁶ Larsson, *Kalmarunionens tid*, pp. 449–59; I. Svalenius, *Gustaf Vasa* (Stockholm, 1950); M. Venge, *Christian 2.s fald: Spillet om magten i Danmark januar–februar 1523* (Odense, 1972); M. Venge, “Når vinden følger sig.”: *Spillet om magten i Danmark marts–december 1523* (Odense, 1977); Hørby, “Tiden fra 1340 til 1523”, pp. 255–9.

Conclusion

KNUT HELLE

At the end of the Viking Age the establishment of three separate Nordic kingdoms hardly seemed a self-evident course of future events. The prospect of direct Danish rule over most of southern Scandinavia, combined with an indirect overlordship of other parts of the region, must have appeared at least as likely. Yet, in the course of the early Middle Ages the kingdoms of Norway and Sweden came to comprise most of their later territories on the Scandinavian peninsula and developed far enough for their survival to be secured. During the same period Christianity was firmly established in all Scandinavian-speaking communities and its Church reached the organisational stage where bishops ruled territorial bishoprics from permanent sees with cathedrals, monastic institutions were firmly established, and payment of tithe was being introduced. From the beginning of the twelfth century the Nordic churches were also organised as a separate church province under the supremacy of the archbishop of Lund (Part II).

All this does not mean that the political and ecclesiastical situation was stable at the onset of the high Middle Ages in the mid-twelfth century. The three kingdoms lacked centralised systems of government and their unity was seriously threatened by dynastic rivalry and succession disputes. In Iceland the original distribution of power among numerous chieftains within an all-embracing community of laws was in the process of being disrupted by the concentration of power in the hands of a small number of prominent families whose leaders ruled territorial lordships. As a separate legal entity on a smaller scale, the archipelago of Føroyar seems to have been dominated by chieftains and large landowners. On the north-western outskirts of the Norse world the two small colonies in Greenland led a half-hidden life, mostly beyond the scope of surviving written evidence. To the south-west Orkney and Shetland were under Norwegian overlordship, but the Orkney earls, who ruled the islands, also held the northernmost part of the Scottish mainland in fief from Scottish

monarchs who would eventually challenge the Norwegian dominion over the Western and Northern Isles (Chapter 8).

The independence of the church province of Lund and its direct links with the papal curia were threatened by the efforts of the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen to regain his supremacy over the Nordic churches in cooperation with the German king who aimed at overlordship of the divided Danish kingdom. In Finland it seems that Christian religious practices had by now infiltrated the south-western region, but the Finnish tribes were still outside the influence of the organised western Church and the reach of the Swedish kingdom. The half-nomadic Sami of northernmost Scandinavia traded with Finns and Scandinavians who also exacted tribute from them, but they were not integrated in the Finnish and Scandinavian societies; they also remained largely unaffected by Christianity (Chapter 13).

In the course of the two following centuries this would all change. Soon after 1150 separate Norwegian and Swedish church provinces were carved out of the large province of Lund and brought into direct contact with Rome. The remaining high Middle Ages saw the incorporation of almost all the Scandinavian region in the three Nordic kingdoms and also, with the exception of the Sami territories, in the Nordic churches. In Parts III–VII high and late medieval political and ecclesiastical developments have been set out in some detail against a broader demographic, economic, social and cultural background. What remains is a final overview of the main developments in high and late medieval Scandinavia.

Regardless of whether there was a demographic crisis or not in the late sixth and early seventh centuries (see Introduction and Chapter 3) it seems clear that the following six centuries constitute a period of more or less continuous material growth in Scandinavia. Populations may have trebled from the Merovingian Age to about 1300, in interaction with a marked expansion of settlement, including the first phase of urbanisation, and with an increasing output from agrarian and other primary production. These developments and their social aspects have been dealt with in Part III.

The size of medieval populations cannot be safely calculated at any one time, but it is clear that the population of the mainland kingdom of Norway, estimated at somewhere between 350,000 and 550,000 towards the end of the high Middle Ages, was much smaller than (perhaps less than half) the number of inhabitants of the Danish kingdom; it was also significantly smaller than the Swedish-speaking population of the kingdom of Sweden. The fact that the Danish and Swedish kingdoms commanded greater resources in terms

of population and material resources helps explain Norway's weak position when it was drawn into closer contact with its neighbours in the Scandinavian unions of the late Middle Ages.

As populations increased, rural settlement became denser in already colonised areas and spread across a greater part of Scandinavia. Settlement growth was mainly determined by the opportunities to practise farming with the technology available, but in coastal districts fishing and the exploitation of other aquatic resources were also decisive for the location of settlements. There was a general expansion from central areas with favourable conditions for agriculture towards more peripheral and less suitable land. Colonisation proceeded inland from the coasts, towards higher altitudes, and further northwards. Forested areas, including commons, were cleared and heavier clayey soils that were potentially fertile began to be cultivated when improved implements made that possible.

The spread and localisation of settlement were influenced not only by the growth of population but also by improved farming methods and technology, such as the introduction of systematic crop rotation (in large parts of Denmark, Sweden and Finland, and in smaller areas in Norway) and the increased use of iron in farming implements. In Finland settlement expansion started later and lasted longer than in the rest of Scandinavia, and was made particularly extensive by the widespread use of advanced techniques of slash-and-burn cultivation.

Colonisation changed the territorial distribution of ethnic groups in northern Scandinavia. In Finland medieval settlement expansion towards the north resulted in an east-Finnish and a west-Finnish cultural zone. The former was established by Karelians, whose settlements in the twelfth century started to spread from the core area around Lake Ladoga and in the following centuries advanced almost as far as Lake Päijänne in the west and reached the shores of the White Sea in the north-east. The last was the result of the expansion of west-Finnish settlers who at the beginning of the Middle Ages started to colonise Österbotten, the coastal area east of the Gulf of Bothnia. They moved northwards until they reached the Arctic Circle, and at the same time advanced around the head of the gulf towards northern Sweden where, towards the end of the high Middle Ages, they met the northward movement of Swedish colonists. This resulted in a cultural barrier in Swedish Västerbotten at roughly 65°N. Conversely, Swedish colonisation, linked to the eastward expansion of Swedish power in the high Middle Ages, affected the western and southern coastal districts of present-day Finland which have largely remained Swedish-speaking since then.

Conclusion

The Norse Viking Age colonisation of the North Atlantic islands coincided with internal colonisation of areas of mainland Norway which formerly lacked sedentary settlement, and this continued into the early and high Middle Ages. There were already in the Viking Age sparse Norse coastal settlements as far as Finnmark. During the first medieval centuries the districts north of Trøndelag became the object of more active agrarian colonisation in combination with exploitation of the resources of the sea, and from the mid-thirteenth century the expanding fish trade caused an increasing influx of Norse settlers into Troms and Finnmark. In order to gain control of these districts the Norwegian crown supported the Norse coastal colonisation and was behind the first efforts to convert the Sami to Christianity.

The northward and inland expansion of Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish colonists meant occupation of areas where formerly only Sami hunters and gatherers had lived, and must to some extent have reduced their freedom of movement in mountain and forest areas and along the coast of northernmost Norway. Most Sami continued their nomadic way of life throughout the Middle Ages, moving between summer and winter sites and supporting themselves by hunting and fishing. However, the coastal Sami of northern Norway established a more permanent pattern of settlement, fishing in the open sea, catching sea mammals, and engaging in animal husbandry on a small scale. Along the coast of Troms and Finnmark, Sami and Norwegians thus came to live side by side. Elsewhere the dependency of the Sami on the sedentary population developed further, partly by trade with Finns and Scandinavians, partly by taxation by Scandinavian authorities.

The overwhelming majority of the medieval sedentary population of Scandinavia based their existence on a combination of agriculture, mainly grain cultivation, and animal husbandry, but farmers would generally try to diversify their economy by exploiting all available resources – by fishing, hunting, gathering, forestry, iron production from lake and bog ore, mining and quarrying of certain types of rock. Such auxiliary activities were particularly important in areas less suited to agriculture, as was animal husbandry where grain did not grow well. Varying natural conditions thus led to differences in the farming economy, particularly between coastal and inland, low-lying and high-lying, southern and northern areas.

It was, however, arable farming that, in terms of energy, supplied most of the food. Denmark produced a surplus of grain while Sweden and Finland were normally self-sufficient in grain production. Even Norway may have been potentially self-sufficient, but here the favourable exchange of foreign grain

for exported fish led to a decline of domestic grain cultivation in the western and northern coastal districts so that, from the thirteenth century, Norway became dependent on imported grain. The Norse communities of Greenland and Iceland, where climatic conditions made grain growing impossible or negligible, depended entirely on grain imports.

Agrarian production generally increased in the early and high Middle Ages, as more land was brought under cultivation, farming methods and technology improved, and the growth of population led to an increased input of labour and consequently a greater output per acre. In present-day Finland and Sweden the reserves of land suited for agriculture were apparently more than sufficient to absorb the growing population. However, in the land that makes up present-day Denmark, which was more densely populated than other parts of Scandinavia, population and settlement growth in the high Middle Ages resulted in a shortage of cultivated land and the emergence of numerous small holdings which operated close to subsistence level. This was also the case in Norway where the limited reserves of tillable land were not sufficient to enable food production to keep pace with the population increase, particularly in western Norway which was the source for most of the Viking Age Atlantic colonists.

From prehistoric times there were different patterns of settlement in Scandinavia which in the course of the Middle Ages developed further into structures that have characterised the region ever since. Looking at the rural settlement and production units of Scandinavia as a whole one is struck by one particularly important geographical division. There is a western and northern region – consisting of present-day Norway, western and northern Sweden, Iceland, Føroyar, Shetland and Orkney – where settlement since the Middle Ages has been tied overwhelmingly to individual, separate farms and holdings. On the other hand, villages and hamlets have been and still are the predominant form of rural settlement in the southern and eastern parts of Scandinavia – in Denmark, Sweden and Finland – though there are also areas where separate farms are common. Generally, separate farms have predominated in regions where arable soil is dispersed or scarce, while villages and hamlets have emerged where it is possible to cultivate larger, contiguous areas of land.

However, the fact that village and hamlet settlement did not occur in the best Norwegian agricultural districts in Østlandet and Trøndelag should serve as a warning against the assumption that rural settlement was shaped by natural conditions alone; social factors were also at work. Conversely, the social structure of rural communities was influenced by the settlement structure.

Where there were villages and hamlets it was possible to create larger and more compact concentrations of landed property than was generally the case in districts dominated by separate homesteads. Society in the latter districts therefore tended to be less aristocratic and more egalitarian than society in the typical village regions. It could be said that this tendency has made itself felt in the social structure of the Nordic countries down to our own time.

At the same time the medieval social structure of rural Scandinavia was generally different from that of most of the rest of Europe in certain important respects. Land ownership was predominantly allodial and only to a very small degree influenced by feudal concepts of land tenure. Both large landowners and ordinary freeholders could dispose relatively freely of their land; it could be sold, inherited and, within certain limits, also bequeathed to other than kin. Kin were, however, entitled to first refusal on the sale of inherited land in a legally determined order. The inheritance system was bilateral, though with a preference for male heirs in the west Nordic laws, and feudal primogeniture was not practised.

Another major difference between Scandinavian and most other European communities in the early and high Middle Ages was that the whole agrarian population, with the exception of slaves, were personally free both legally and in practice. Leases of tenant holdings were based on mutually binding agreements and regulated by law in a way that might give priority to the landowners' rights but did not invalidate the basic legal independence of the tenants. They were not tied to the soil, did not – with the exception of a few boon days annually in Denmark – have to perform labour services on the landowners' demesnes, and were not subject to private manorial jurisdiction. There was, in other words, no serfdom or villeinage in early and high medieval Scandinavia, though it should be noted that freed slaves and their issue would for a time remain dependent to some extent on their former masters and their issue, and that there were in Denmark and Sweden cottagers with only small plots of land whose main function was to provide labour for large landowners, partly as service labour and partly as paid work.

Thralldom or slavery was still a social feature to be reckoned with at the beginning of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, as attested by west Nordic law and saga evidence, but its extent and economic significance is hard to assess and it was clearly declining in the early Middle Ages. In Iceland it ceased before 1100 and in Norway mostly in the course of the twelfth century, while in Denmark it lingered on into the first half of the thirteenth century and in Sweden for a century more. In recent research the decline of slavery has mainly been

regarded as a consequence of economic expediency on the part of landowners who found it more profitable to let freed slaves cultivate tenanted plots rather than continue to use slave labour in farming on their own account. This is seen as one of the motive powers behind the growth of the Scandinavian tenancy system.

There is, however, little reliable evidence for the emergence of land tenancy in Scandinavia; consequently the chronology and character of this process remains one of the basic problems of Scandinavian medieval research. According to a time-honoured view, landowning farmers were the dominant group as late as the Viking Age and the beginning of the Middle Ages so that it was not until the high Middle Ages that the tenantry came to form the majority of the Scandinavian farming population. However, tenant farming appears to have existed to some degree as early as the Viking Age and recent research in Denmark and Norway has attached importance to indications of considerable and growing economic and social inequality in Iron Age society which may well have given rise to a quite extensive early form of land tenancy.

There is nevertheless agreement that the proportion of tenancy in relation to freehold increased in the early and high Middle Ages and that by the end of the latter period the majority of farmers in Denmark, Norway and Iceland were tenants. Only in the Swedish kingdom, including Finland, does the proportion of freehold farms appear to have amounted to more than one-half. However, even here tenant farming was dominant in the best and most centrally placed farming regions while freehold predominated in more peripheral districts, which it also did in certain remote parts of Norway.

All over Scandinavia the high medieval tenancy system formed a stable economic basis for large landowners, allowing them to devote themselves to other activities than primary production; it was consequently a mainstay of Crown, Church and aristocracy. At the end of the high Middle Ages land owned by the Church and secular aristocracy amounted to considerably more than half of the farms in the kingdom of Denmark and roughly 60 per cent of the total land value in mainland Norway. Church and aristocracy were also predominant landowners in the central and most fertile farming regions of Sweden. The proportion of land owned by the Crown has been estimated at about 5 per cent of Danish farms and about 7 per cent of the total Norwegian land value but had at an earlier stage been much greater in Norway.

In Denmark and the central farming regions of Sweden there developed a manorial system with large-scale farming of demesnes by slaves (decreasingly), cottagers and paid labour in combination with holdings farmed by tenants. However, from the end of the twelfth century ecclesiastical institutions in

Denmark started to follow the example of European landowners in farming out their demesnes to stewards, as did their secular counterparts later. The stewards became the leaseholders of large farming units with a status resembling that of tenants. In Norway there was no system of manorial farming, though magnates could have quite sizable residential farms that were worked on a larger scale. Large complexes of landed property were scattered and consisted overwhelmingly of tenanted farms and holdings, even parts of holdings.

Among the farming population there was a relatively rigorous division of labour between men and women, along the same lines as elsewhere in Europe. Nevertheless, in peasant society women generally played an important role alongside their husbands in their joint economic activities, and were particularly independent in regions where men were absent for long periods exploiting the resources of the sea and outlying areas. The allodial character of land ownership meant that women could become owners of land, notably through marriage and inheritance. In marriage they had to leave the formal but not necessarily the real administration of their property to their husbands, while unmarried women of age and particularly widows could take control over most of their own assets.

It is a moot question whether the social position of Scandinavian women improved or not in the Middle Ages. Tendencies in both directions have been stressed. Christianity and the Church, for instance, have been blamed for curtailing the religious role of women, important in the pre-Christian cult, and restricting the economic rights of married women, at the same time depriving them of an older right to divorce. On the other hand, it has been argued that women played an important role in the process of Christianisation (cf. Chapter 7) and that the Christian marriage, based on the formal consensus of the spouses, did not only bind them more firmly together as heads of families but also gave both of them a freer position in relation to their kin. Weight has also been attached to the legal right of daughters to inherit alongside sons, established even in west Nordic laws by the late thirteenth century, though it is not altogether clear whether women's economic rights in general improved towards the end of the high Middle Ages. Politically, women of the royal families and the upper aristocracy could play important roles by virtue of their position as wives, widows and mothers, and from the latter part of the thirteenth century queen dowagers could be given formalised political positions during regencies. In Norway women even gained a place in the legal order of hereditary succession in 1302.

Urbanisation in Scandinavia seriously started as one aspect of the strong European cultural influence of the Viking Age and throughout the following early Middle Ages several towns emerged according to the urban criteria used in this volume: a complex centrality in relation to hinterlands of various sizes, a permanently built-up character, and various forms of urban organisation. Such places served the needs of both local and long distance trade but seem above all to have been promoted by the royal power in cooperation with the early Church as centres of government and administration. Early medieval urbanisation in Scandinavia can thus to a large extent be seen as one aspect of the making of the Scandinavian kingdoms. It brought into existence a good handful of Norwegian towns and the royal foundation of Sigtuna in Sweden but was most extensive in Denmark, the most populous of the Scandinavian kingdoms and the one closest to Europe.

In the high Middle Ages Sweden and Denmark, like the rest of Europe, saw a broader wave of urbanisation while in less populous Norway only a few new places were added to the early medieval urban structure, all of them relatively small. Existing Norwegian towns were, however, expanding rapidly, particularly the international trading centre of Bergen which also became the first true political capital of the kingdom. The cases of Bergen and its younger parallel Stockholm clearly reveal the chief motive powers behind the high medieval wave of urbanisation: the commercial revolution of the period – with exchange of a wider range of mass products over greater distances and a more advanced commercial organisation – and the further political centralisation of the Scandinavian kingdoms. Most new high medieval towns were established in the central parts of the Danish kingdom, including Skåne, and in the region round Lake Mälaren, the centre of gravity of the Swedish kingdom.

By the mid-fourteenth century there were altogether about a hundred towns in Scandinavia, most of them in the southern part of the region where they were concentrated in the coastal areas and linked by sailing routes. Denmark had about sixty, Sweden, including the Finnish part of the kingdom, almost thirty, and Norway only a dozen, which reflects the differences between the kingdoms in terms of population. There were no towns in Iceland and the other Norse island communities of the north Atlantic, nor in the northern parts of the Norwegian and Swedish kingdoms, with the possible exception of Vågan in the Norwegian Lofoten Islands. This was a geographic pattern that was to determine the urban system of Scandinavia for the rest of the Middle Ages and long afterwards.

Conclusion

Urban autonomy was increasing in high medieval Scandinavia, as it was in the rest of Europe, and was demonstrated by privileges, urban codes, and above all the introduction of town councils from the mid-thirteenth century. However, the fact that the development of Scandinavian medieval towns was from the start closely connected with the evolution of more centralised political systems meant that their autonomy remained restricted in comparison with that of the most advanced European urbanised areas. Through its urban officials the monarchy continued to play a dominant controlling role, particularly strong – it appears – in Norway and least so in Denmark, which was also in this respect closer to European models than the other Scandinavian kingdoms.

Scandinavian medieval towns were generally small and their populations seem to have constituted less than 5 per cent of the total populations of the three kingdoms. Nevertheless, through their central place functions in relation to their hinterlands – in government and administration, trade and crafts, religious and cultural life – towns played a much greater role than their modest share of the total population would seem to indicate. Urban society was also in general more dynamic than rural society, leading the way, for instance, in expanding local self-management, increasing social mobility, and giving women greater economic independence.

The development of Scandinavian political organisation in the high Middle Ages has been set out in Chapters 8(a)–8(e) and summed up (8(a)) as centralisation and growth of public authority under the king, Church and secular aristocracy. This is a process that can only be understood against the backdrop of the main lines of societal development brought together above. It was basically conditioned by the general growth of population and production and was part of a general tendency towards greater social specialisation and division of labour, of which the growth of the tenancy system and the process of urbanisation were particularly important aspects. At the same time it was heavily influenced by the opening up of Scandinavia towards Europe that was a consequence of the Viking expansion.

In all three kingdoms succession struggles from the 1130s paved the way for stronger and more firmly organised monarchic rule; they lasted less than three decades in Denmark, to give way to the strong Valdemarian monarchy (1157–1241), but went on for a century or more in Norway and Sweden. In Norway it is clear that the extensive civil warfare in the last decades of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries contributed to the general strengthening of the monarchy by increasing its military power and thereby

also its ability to impose greater burdens on peasant society. In Denmark the contemporaneous military expansionism of the monarchy obviously worked in the same direction.

The Valdemarian monarchy led to the emergence in Denmark of a high medieval kingdom of European type in close collaboration with the secular aristocracy and, after about 1170, joined by the Church. In the same period there were clear institutional tendencies in the same direction in the still divided kingdom of Norway, starting with the establishment of a separate Norwegian church province in 1152 or 1153 and particularly close cooperation between the Church and monarchy in the reign of Magnus Erlingsson (1161–84). The development of a more state-like political organisation continued in Denmark up to the end of the Valdemarian Age in 1241 and in Norway was completed, as far as it went in the Middle Ages, in the second half of the thirteenth and the early decades of the fourteenth centuries. Sweden for a long time lagged behind Denmark and Norway in the process of political unification and centralisation. It is true that a separate Swedish church province had been established by 1164, but it was not until the mid-thirteenth century that a more centralised and firmly organised kingdom started to emerge under the Folkung monarchy.

Common features of political centralisation in all three kingdoms were the establishment of a governmental apparatus both locally and centrally, peace legislation inspired by the Church clearing the way for a more extensive royal legislation, and a more comprehensive public justice maintained by the Crown and, in its own field, by the Church. An official ideology representing the king as the holder of his office by the grace of God and the development of a courtly culture may have contributed to creating a more respectful and obedient attitude to his authority among his subjects (Chapter 14).

In all three kingdoms the Crown managed to convert the contributions of the population to the common system of defence – the naval levy – into permanent taxes on land. In Denmark and Sweden magnates of the old aristocracy and smaller landowners had their land, including tenant farms, exempted from such taxation in return for royal cavalry service. In both kingdoms the naval levy lost its military significance in the thirteenth century, giving way to a military system based on heavily armed cavalry and royal castles. In Norway, where natural conditions did not favour the use of cavalry, the naval levy retained its military importance into the early fourteenth century. Royal taxation was consequently more lenient and the tax exemption of the royal retainers of the *hirð* much more limited than in the neighbouring kingdoms. Nevertheless, this exemption in Norway, as elsewhere, created a privileged noble class which

together with the Crown and Church constituted a more distinct ruling élite than had previously been seen in the Nordic societies.

It should, however, be noted that the private resources of the Norwegian *hirð* aristocracy were much more limited than those of its Danish and Swedish counterparts and its dependence on the income and status received through royal service correspondingly greater. This explains why relations between the Norwegian crown and aristocracy were relatively harmonious in the latter part of the high Middle Ages while in Denmark and Sweden the royal power was limited – or at least counterbalanced – by a powerful aristocratic opposition. This helps explain why in Denmark and Sweden the elective principle came to govern the system of royal succession while a virtually automatic hereditary succession was established in Norway in the second half of the thirteenth century. In the late Middle Ages the Scandinavian union monarchs sought to re-establish a Norwegian-type hereditary succession while the aristocratic opposition favoured the elective principle.

The national royal assemblies convoked in Denmark and Norway from the latter part of the twelfth century grew more frequent and assumed a more clearly representative function in the following century, when such meetings are also known in Sweden. In Denmark they came to be called *danehof* and functioned as organs of the aristocratic opposition in the second half of the thirteenth century. They could assume the same function in Sweden, while in Norway they generally served the interests of the Crown. The Nordic assemblies corresponded to the contemporary European pattern of early parliaments, which in the late Middle Ages developed into general estates or a unique institution such as the English Parliament, but they did not become permanent institutions. Instead, the need for a more regular decision-making body alongside the king in the Scandinavian kingdoms from the 1280s was met by the smaller and better institutionalised royal councils, which were given a representative and sanctioning role in addition to their original consultative function. As a more autonomous corporation the royal council became from around 1320 the ‘council of the realm’, a peculiar Scandinavian institution which in the late Middle Ages was the only regular governmental body at the side of the monarch.

In all three kingdoms the Church contributed very significantly to social cohesion and political centralisation – by its unifying religious influence, by its hierarchically and nationally organised systems of administration, and by churchmen’s administrative and ideological support of the monarchy. In Sweden, ecclesiastical support for the Crown remained important throughout the high Middle Ages, and in spite of clashes between the Crown and Church

at certain times it was always important in Norway too. In Denmark, however, the close cooperation of the Valdemarian monarchy with the Church was followed by bitter conflicts between kings and archbishops, which contributed to the weakening of the kingdom in the second half of the thirteenth century.

In general, Christianity seems to have penetrated Scandinavia more or less in the same fashion as the rest of Europe, although more slowly. This is particularly true for Sweden and Finland, and among the Sami we have already seen that it did not strike roots at all in the Middle Ages. It seems clear that the Church succeeded in introducing its doctrine and making its rituals and customs an integral part of people's daily life. To what degree they were also personally moved by the message of the Gospel has been debated but is impossible to assess. It has, however, been suggested that signs of the new tendencies towards a more personal religion in more central regions of Western Christendom in the high and late Middle Ages, leading not least to heretical movements, were less prominent in Scandinavia. On the other hand, the Church and its doctrine may have contributed, together with the monarchy, to personal relations more strongly coloured by a hierarchical organisation of society, making obedience and service more prominent virtues both in religious and secular life (Chapter 14).

Virtually all formal education in medieval Scandinavia took place in ecclesiastical institutions such as monastic and cathedral schools, and it was primarily members of the clergy who sought higher education abroad, first at monastic and cathedral seats of learning and then at the European universities that emerged from the late twelfth century. The Church, together with the monarchy, also created the main milieus for high and late medieval art and architecture, and intellectual life in general, and funded the activities in these spheres.

The medieval narrative literature of Iceland, particularly the classical family sagas, may perhaps be considered as Scandinavia's most remarkable contribution to world literature. Medieval Scandinavian writers, both Icelanders and others, also made important contributions to other literary genres, such as history writing in general, the ballad, the romance and the rhyme chronicle, to the extent that the high Middle Ages stand out as the crowning point of literary life. Religious houses, episcopal sees and royal courts formed the main centres of literary activity (Chapter 15).

Medieval Scandinavian art and architecture clearly reflected the society in which they were produced, not least the dominant position of the Church and monarchy. Most of what remains of art and monumental architecture was

produced for ecclesiastical purposes; there are very few remains of secular buildings and their decorations. European influences were strongly at work, following trade and pilgrimage routes, ecclesiastical and diplomatic lines of communication, so that Scandinavia passed through the main Romanesque and Gothic phases concurrently with the rest of Europe. The full flowering of medieval Scandinavian art and architecture occurred in the high Middle Ages when foreign influences often interacted fruitfully with native traditions. It was essentially the demographic crisis of the late Middle Ages and its negative effects on the economy of the Church and monarchy that put an end to the great artistic and architectural display of the preceding period (Chapter 16).

The expansion of population, settlement and production throughout the early and high Middle Ages had apparently begun to slow down in western Europe by the early decades of the fourteenth century and there may even have been a decline in some places. A corresponding development has been suggested for Scandinavia but there are no clear signs of a serious decline of population and a corresponding contraction of settlement until the Black Death and the subsequent outbreaks of plague (Chapter 18).

The dramatic effects of the great pestilence and the later plague epidemics have left their clearest traces in Norwegian records and settlement structure, and thus it is in Norway that research into these matters has been particularly broad in scope and intensive. It has been calculated that more than half of the maximum number of high medieval named farms and nearly two-thirds of the corresponding number of family holdings were abandoned. The loss of population is thought to have been of the same order, around 60–65 per cent according to the latest estimates.

The desertion of farms caused by depopulation appears to have been less extensive in Denmark and Sweden but this does not mean that the population losses caused by plague were less severe; such a difference would indeed be difficult to explain. Rather it seems that the abandonment of farms is less conspicuous in the recorded settlement pattern of Denmark and Sweden, consisting mostly of villages, hamlets and otherwise close groups of generally larger farms than those constituting the single farm settlement structure of Norway. Moreover, there was in the central Danish and Swedish agricultural districts a greater number of landless or near-landless farm labourers who could disappear without leaving a trace in the recorded settlement pattern. To the extent that they survived and settled on available land they would also reduce the number of abandoned farms.

Finland and northern Sweden appear to have escaped the Black Death and the high medieval expansion of settlement continued throughout the late Middle Ages, as was also the case in northernmost Norway (Troms and Finnmark). Iceland, too, was spared the Black Death but later plague attacks caused depopulation and desertion of farms, though not to the same degree as in Norway. In Greenland the entire Norse population disappeared in the fifteenth century, probably for other (still unknown) reasons than plague.

The decrease of population led to great economic and social changes as different groups tried to adapt to the new situation (Chapter 19). Along with the contraction of settlement land prices and land rents dropped dramatically in Norway and considerably in Denmark, too, whereas the information on rents and prices in Sweden and Finland hardly permits any chronological comparison. There was, however, a declining trend in land prices in Swedish Uppland. Such crisis phenomena primarily affected the great noble and ecclesiastical landowners who were predominant in Denmark, Norway and central parts of Sweden; they suffered a great loss of income and a severe depreciation of their capital in land. The same was true, to some degree, for the Crown.

Conversely, the changes in the late medieval agrarian economy caused by shortage of people and labour were generally to the benefit of the broad mass of the rural population. The decrease in land rents particularly favoured tenants, and farm labourers benefited from the rising wages caused by shortage of labour. Such changes seem to have had their greatest effects in Denmark and Norway. In Denmark, and also in central parts of Sweden, large-scale farming was reduced to the advantage of larger and more homogeneous tenant farms, which meant a homogenisation of the peasantry as well. In Norway the same effect resulted from the abandonment of numerous smallholdings.

In many parts of Scandinavia there was a clear shift of emphasis from cereal cultivation to animal husbandry, caused by changes in demand and prices and helped by the large number of deserted farms which could be utilised for grazing and haymaking. At the same time, subsidiary means of livelihood brought improved conditions and even wealth to some parts of the peasantry, affecting a marked social and economic differentiation in late medieval rural society.

Fishing and the trade in fish products increased their proportional importance in the Norwegian economy and led to settlement expansion in the form of fishing villages on the outer coast, particularly in northernmost Norway. The late Middle Ages also saw the emergence of fishing and the fish trade as important elements in the Icelandic economy. The large-scale herring fisheries of Skåne and Bohuslän continued into the late Middle Ages and from about

1500 the corresponding fisheries in the Limfjord and the bight of Ho in western Jylland grew in importance. Around the Gulf of Bothnia fishing, especially for salmon, brought affluence, with catches being taken to Stockholm and partly exported from there. A similar pattern developed in Norway where north and west Norwegian and Icelandic catches were exported via Bergen.

In Sweden iron and copper mining developed into an industry of major importance, engaging perhaps 3 per cent of the total population and bringing profit not only to the low nobility and freeholders of the mining districts, but also to the people of the adjacent and sometimes distant regions who provided the mining districts with foodstuffs and other commodities. In the southern part of Norway export of lumber became an important part of the farming economy, particularly after the introduction of the water-powered gate saw in the late fifteenth century. Peasant seafaring activities flourished in the coastal regions, and in some areas a professional carrying trade was established, as was the case in southern Scandinavia and in Åland and part of the south-west Finnish archipelago.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, when the demographic trend finally changed and the shortage of tenants and wage-labourers lessened, economic conditions started to work against most of the rural population and to favour the high-status groups that had suffered in the preceding crisis. This was, however, a long-term process which did not culminate until the early Modern Period. It also appears that the late medieval social and economic trend favouring the broad rural population instilled the peasantry with a greater self-confidence, which goes some way to explain the Scandinavian peasant uprisings of the period that were directed against increasing taxation and to explain other attempts to restore the lost economic positions of the social and political élite.

The effects of the late medieval demographic crisis on urban development (Chapter 20) are hard to assess and still but little understood. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the dramatic population losses of the second half of the fourteenth century and the consequent economic disruptions put an end to the rapid urbanisation of the preceding period. New urban foundations in the late Middle Ages were mostly complementary and unimportant; in the second half of the fourteenth century there was none in Denmark and very few in Sweden. In Norway new towns were not at all established in the late Middle Ages, with the exception of the small township of Oddevall (present-day Swedish Uddevalla) in Bohuslän. However, it is also argued (Chapter 20) that the density of towns achieved before 1350 had come a long way towards satisfying the need for urban centres within the framework of medieval Scandinavian society.

Be this as it may, there is little doubt that as collection centres for royal and ecclesiastical revenues and places of residence for private landowners, the towns must have been hit by the fall in land rents, taxes and other public sources of income. Such consequences cannot easily be quantified but have nevertheless been shown to have had clear negative effects on the development of Norwegian episcopal towns such as Trondheim, Oslo, Stavanger and Hamar, whereas historians have so far been more cautious in outlining corresponding developments in the late medieval Danish and Swedish towns.

On the other hand, the generally increasing degree of commercialisation in late medieval northern Europe clearly favoured those Scandinavian towns whose economic rationale lay in the exchange of goods, and helped them overcome the vacuum created by the population losses. This was particularly true for the regional centres that were the foci of international trade, such as Bergen, Stockholm, København, Malmö and Kalmar. The growing importance of commerce also seems to have proved advantageous to smaller towns able to trade in products for which there was growing demand. In addition, the leading towns of København and Stockholm were particularly favoured by their increasing importance as political and administrative centres.

Foreign guests and immigrants came to play an important part in the urban life of the most prominent trading centres. From the thirteenth century and throughout the rest of the Middle Ages Hanseatic merchants, especially those from Lübeck, increasingly used their organisational and financial strength to dominate Scandinavian foreign trade, notably the export of metals from Sweden, salted herring from Skåne, and stockfish and other fish products from Bergen. The Germans came, originally, as guests in the sailing season in the summer half of the year but soon started to stay for the winter.

Apparently, the restrictive policy of the Crown contributed to keeping the number of permanently resident Germans at a modest level in Danish towns, whereas in Sweden German visitors were invited to settle in Stockholm, Kalmar and other trading towns where they may have constituted up to one-third of the burghers. In Norway German 'winter-sitting' was allowed from the 1250s, though at times restricted, and eventually led to the establishment of the half-extraterritorial and very dominant Hanseatic trading station or *Kontor* of Bergen and to smaller and better integrated trading factories in the east Norwegian towns of Oslo and Tønsberg. In some places and for certain periods Hanseatic merchants faced competition from other foreigners – the English, Scots and, above all, the Dutch, who towards the end of the Middle Ages were favoured by Scandinavian rulers in order to counterbalance the Hanseatic influence – but they kept their grip on Scandinavian foreign

trade until the sixteenth century, which made the Hansa under Lübeck's leadership a significant factor in late medieval Scandinavian politics.

An important social effect of the late medieval demographic crisis was a reduction in the number of noblemen in Norway and Denmark. The Norwegian low nobility was drastically weakened by the loss of income which followed the fall in population and there are indications of a similar trend in Denmark and Sweden, particularly in the fifteenth century. In Denmark and Sweden, however, the high nobility overcame the negative effects of the population decline and acquired a dominant position in late medieval society, separating itself more clearly from the rest of the population, while the corresponding élite in Norway was strongly reduced in number in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Chapter 21). As the secular (and ecclesiastical) aristocracy was the mainstay of the late medieval system of government in Scandinavia, taking care of the royal regional and local administration through the system of *len* (fiefs) and participating in central decision-making through the councils of the realms, this would change the balance of power in Scandinavia to the disadvantage of the Norwegian kingdom.

Following a trend in the German territories east of the Elbe and in other parts of eastern central Europe, the Danish high nobility used its economic and political strength to acquire rights of jurisdiction over their servants and tenants and to restrict the mobility of tenants, eventually tying the tenants of Sjælland and a few small islands nearby to the soil so that their legal position towards the end of the Middle Ages began to resemble serfdom. This would, however, have only a minor impact on the relatively favourable economic status of the Danish tenantry and the internal autonomy of Danish village and hamlet societies. There were tendencies in the same direction in Sweden but the Swedish high nobility were only marginally successful in their attempts to restrict the freedom of their tenants (Chapter 19).

Like the nobility the Church was badly affected by the economic consequences of the late medieval loss of population, as seen by a marked decline in tithe and judicial incomes as well as a dramatic general fall in land rents; at the same time the Black Death and the following plague epidemics caused a severe shortage of clerics. However, the Church's administrative system and organisation remained largely intact, and the systematic work carried out to re-establish its financial basis and adapt to the loss of clergy enabled it to overcome the effects of the demographic crisis sooner than the monarchy. In this way the Church and clergy seem to have increased their influence in late medieval Scandinavian society. The profound effects of plague and warfare on

the minds of the people may also have had a large part to play in bringing the Church and Christianity to prominence during this time.

However, the monastic movement was permanently affected by the loss of population and its economic consequences, and its general stagnation and decline could not be compensated for by the relative success of the Bridgettine movement in the fifteenth century. Ecclesiastical autonomy was threatened by the practice of appointing bishops and other prelates by papal 'provision' in collaboration with kings and princes. Nevertheless, the Church exerted considerable political influence through the *ex officio* participation of bishops and the high position of archbishops in the councils of the realms (Chapter 22).

Politically, the late Middle Ages stand out as the period of unions between two or all three Scandinavian kingdoms. Quite clearly, these unions were rooted in the growing inter-Scandinavian entanglement of the latter part of the high Middle Ages (Chapter 8(e)).

In Denmark the death of King Valdemar II in 1241 marked the end of the expansive Valdemarian Age, and in the following period of political unrest – when Valdemar's sons and their descendants fought each other over the succession and bitter conflicts occurred between the Crown and Church – the Danish kingdom was threatened with disintegration and seriously weakened in relation to its Scandinavian neighbours and the powers of northern Germany.

It was precisely in the same period that the Folkung monarchy was established by Earl Birger Magnusson, converting Sweden into a unified kingdom, and that the strength of the medieval Norwegian kingdom culminated under King Håkon Håkonsson and his descendants. The two consolidated kingdoms directed part of their new-found internal strength to expansion in directions which were determined by their geographical situations. Sweden expanded towards Finland, which was gradually included into the Swedish realm, Gotland and the eastern Baltic, whereas Norway directed much of its foreign interests towards the Norse island communities of the Western Ocean, including Iceland, which were all included in the Norwegian dominion of King Håkon Håkonsson and which, with the exception of the Hebrides and Man, remained there under his descendants. At the same time Norwegian and Swedish interests made themselves increasingly felt in the Sami territories of northern Scandinavia where they found a common antagonist in the Russian principality of Novgorod but did not yet clash with each other. However, internal

Scandinavian relations soon became more tense in the south as the rulers of Norway and Sweden tried to exploit the internal weakness of the Danish kingdom to their own advantage.

King Håkon Håkonsson had territorial ambitions in Danish Halland, south of the Göta river, probably with a view to finally controlling Skåne and the increasing trade and shipping between the Baltic and the North Sea. This would strengthen his position in relation to Lübeck and other German ports of the Baltic which now seriously started to make themselves felt in the economies of all three Nordic kingdoms. Håkon's active and aggressive policy towards Denmark, based on Norwegian naval power and exploiting the various forces of opposition to the ruling royal line there, was softened by his son and successor Magnus Lawmender, but was resumed after 1280, in the reigns of his grandsons Eirik and Håkon V.

An alliance with the Swedish kingdom, which was now in the process of opening up towards the west, was of high priority in Norwegian foreign policy but did not succeed. Basically, it was not in the long-term interest of the Swedish monarchy to help to promote a coherent Norwegian dominion over the western coastal districts. From a Swedish point of view it was preferable to preserve a Danish–Norwegian power balance to the west and pursue purely Swedish ends in relation to Denmark; in the latter respect the riches of Danish Skåne and its International Fair would eventually attract Swedish more than Norwegian interests. Consequently, the main political constellation in the increasing inter-Scandinavian entanglement of the latter part of the thirteenth and the first two decades of the fourteenth centuries was an alliance between the ruling monarchs of Denmark and Sweden, leaving it to the Norwegian government to cooperate with the forces of opposition in Denmark and Sweden. Hence the Norwegian support of the Danish magnates outlawed for complicity in the murder of King Erik Klipping in 1286 and of the Swedish dukes Erik and Valdemar in their conflict with their brother King Birger after 1304.

One result of this policy was the establishment of an inter-Nordic enclave at the intersection of the three kingdoms around the mouth of the Göta river, consisting of Danish North Halland to the south and Norwegian *Elvesysle* (south Bohuslän) to the north. The castles dominating the two districts were first held by Count Jacob of North Halland, one of the Danish outlaws' leaders, and later by Duke Erik Magnusson who added the adjoining west Swedish provinces. From this powerbase Erik took over the Norwegian policy of expansion towards Denmark, outmanoeuvring his father-in-law to be, King Håkon V, who had hoped to use Erik for his own ends. It now became clear that the

economic and military resources of the Norwegian kingdom were not sufficient to enforce the intentions of its Scandinavian policy in a military situation where success depended more on castles and landed forces than naval power. This would explain the dawning isolationism that is noticeable in Norwegian government circles in Håkon V's last years. The Norwegian kingdom had been reduced to a pawn in the Scandinavian power-play it had done so much to start in the mid-thirteenth century, and had every reason to fear the dominance of stronger adversaries.

The strongest of these, besides Duke Erik, was the Danish king Erik Menved whose renewal of the Danish claims to Germany north of the Elbe and further ambitions in the eastern Baltic threatened the Wendish ports headed by Lübeck and made them prone to join the coalitions Duke Erik worked to build against him. In the short run, Duke Erik seemed the more successful of the two, as he managed to work out agreements with both Erik Menved and his brother King Birger which secured for him and his ducal brother Valdemar the greater part of the Swedish realm as well as the acceptance of his Norwegian marriage, which promised to give him control of Norway through the eventual succession of his infant son to the Norwegian throne. At the same time, Erik Menved's power was weakening as he met with increasing internal opposition and had to mortgage parts of his realm in order to finance his warfare in north Germany.

In the second decade of the fourteenth century the scene thus seemed set for a closer dynastic connection between ducal Sweden and Norway, threatening both King Birger in Sweden and the Danish kingdom, particularly the Danish possession of Skåne. It was in this situation that King Birger took the dramatic action against his ducal brothers which ended in their death in prison in 1318. However, what Birger and Erik Menved, his probable accomplice, had not anticipated, was the strength of the following Swedish uprising which put Duke Erik's three-year-old son Magnus on the Swedish throne in 1319, the same year which saw his hereditary succession to the Norwegian throne and the death of Erik Menved. Thus was ushered in the series of late medieval unions between two or three Scandinavian kingdoms.

Scandinavian high politics in the late Middle Ages cannot be understood without basic knowledge of the contemporary political system (outlined in Chapter 23). In all three kingdoms the privileged élite of nobility and high clergy was the main political factor alongside the monarchs. As the tendencies towards institutionalisation of national royal assemblies were largely broken off in the fourteenth century, the chief decision-making body alongside the king was the

council of each realm, consisting of members of the high nobility and leading churchmen with the archbishops and bishops as more or less self-appointed members, although the councils could at times be supplemented by a wider circle of nobles and clerics and occasionally also by a broader popular element. The latter gained importance in the Swedish political meetings of the realm that from the 1430s were convoked in politically turbulent periods and eventually developed into the Swedish *riksdag* (parliament). However, until the end of the Middle Ages only the three councils regularly represented the commonalty of their respective realms in their relations with the monarchy whose tools they could also be.

Local administration was taken care of through the system of *len* (fiefs), the districts of varying size in which royal grantees exercised royal authority in return for a share of the royal incomes they collected. Particularly important were the castle-*len*, surrounding the royal castles which formed the nodal points of local and regional administration. For members of the high nobility it was vitally important to have access to the power and income enjoyed by *len* holders. Consequently, it was a consistent policy of the council aristocracy of all three kingdoms throughout the late Middle Ages to reserve castles and other *len* for themselves, to the exclusion of royal favourites of lower or foreign descent. The monarchs, on their part, did what they could to control the *len* through loyal servants and gain as much income as possible from them.

It was with the accession of new rulers in all three Scandinavian kingdoms in 1319–20 that the councils of the realms emerged as more independent than the royal councils they superseded. In Sweden the council was behind the election of King Magnus Eriksson in 1319 and the accompanying Charter of Liberties which placed him under the law. In the same year, the Swedish and Norwegian councils came to terms on the personal union that followed from Magnus' hereditary succession to the Norwegian throne. Both acted as regency councils during Magnus' minority, setting the king's mother, Duchess Ingebjørg, and her circle aside. In Denmark the counsellors of the realm were the effective force behind the election of King Christopher II and the accession charter which set bounds to his rule in 1320 (these and other events of late medieval union history have been outlined in Chapter 23).

Thus, the Swedish and Danish councils in 1319–20 established themselves as elective bodies, and they continued as such throughout the rest of the Middle Ages. The Norwegian council for a long time continued to cling to the principle of hereditary succession but, starting with the acclamation of King Magnus' younger son Håkon VI as his Norwegian successor in 1343–4, manipulated the legal rules of succession in a manner that gradually brought

the Norwegian kingdom towards the elective status it finally reached in the mid-fifteenth century.

Late medieval Nordic politics continued to be strongly influenced by the geopolitical conditions and aspirations which were behind the inter-Scandinavian entanglement of the latter part of the high Middle Ages. As trade and shipping between the Baltic and the North Sea increased further, the towns and castles of the Sound region gained in importance and in the fourteenth century the Danish sovereignty over Skåne was for a period lost to Sweden. The quest for Skåne brought the German Hansa, particularly the Wendish towns under Lübeck's leadership, ever deeper into Scandinavian politics, and also attracted the north German princes of Mecklenburg who through the marriage of Duke Albrecht to King Magnus Eriksson's sister Eufemia established a claim to the Swedish throne and later also to the Danish throne through the marriage between Albrecht's son Heinrich and the eldest daughter of King Valdemar IV. There were other foreign players, too, in the political game centred on Skåne and the Sound region, such as the Dutch, whom the union monarchs from the fifteenth century were inclined to favour at the cost of the Hansa. The Hansa, together with the Teutonic Order, also took a strong interest in the strategically placed island of Gotland, which had been drawn into the Swedish realm in the late thirteenth century but became another bone of contention between Sweden and Denmark from the latter part of the fourteenth century.

Another factor of great importance in late medieval Scandinavian politics were the north German counts of Holstein, to whom the greater part of Danish *len*, including Skåne, were mortgaged in the 1320s. In the following period the Holsteiners vied with the Danish monarchy over the control of the duchy of Schleswig which they held fully or partly as a princely *len* under the Danish crown and did their best to remove from Danish sovereignty. It was not until King Christian I of Oldenburg was elected duke of Schleswig in 1460 that the duchy reverted to the factual control of the Danish crown, followed by the county of Holstein which shortly afterwards became a duchy of its own.

Politically, the demographic crisis of the latter part of the fourteenth century had its greatest effects in Norway, leading to a drastic fall in royal incomes which put overwhelming strains on a governmental system which, long before this time, had been based on scant personal and material resources. The local communal apparatus, which had previously been developed on the initiative of the Crown and Church, continued its activities in the late Middle Ages

with a greater independence than earlier, but the Crown's initiative and ability to act, internally as well as externally, diminished in the second half of the fourteenth century. The last separate Norwegian monarch of the Middle Ages, King Håkon VI (1355–80), acted in concert with the council of the realm, but during the ensuing union with Denmark, and for periods with Sweden too, the Norwegian aristocracy and council were not able to hold their own against the union monarchs and the much stronger aristocracy of the neighbouring kingdoms.

In Denmark and Sweden, the politico-structural changes which occurred from the mid-fourteenth century cannot be related in the same fashion to the demographic crisis. From 1340 Denmark saw the policy of monarchic recovery and restitution carried out by King Valdemar IV with broad societal support, including that of the nobility and high clergy and consequently also the council of the realm. Valdemar's failure in his warfare against the Hanseatic League and his death in 1375, with the succession question still unresolved, opened the way for a strong aristocratic influence on the government of the kingdom through the council of the realm.

Sweden was nevertheless the kingdom where the aristocracy, acting through the council of the realm, came most strongly to the political forefront in the fourteenth century, opposing and finally deposing King Magnus Eriksson, calling in and electing Albrecht of Mecklenburg (1363–89) in his place, setting bounds to Albrecht's power, and finally deposing him as well.

Seen in the influential perspective adopted by the Swedish historian Erik Lönnroth, Scandinavian high politics in the late Middle Ages appear as a tug-of-war between two main political agendas. On the one hand, the monarchy was seeking to retain its power as free from restrictions as possible; on the other hand the aristocracy was seeking to use the council of the realm to set limits to royal power, following a programme of constitutionalism. Both took their inspiration and shape from monarchic and constitutional movements in contemporary Europe, partly from royal and princely ideology and policy, partly from the relationship between the papacy and the conciliar movement, and were by Lönnroth labelled *regimen regale* and *regimen politicum*, respectively, in accordance with contemporary political theory.

The constitutional programme was that the king should rule in accordance with the laws of each individual kingdom. The council of the realm should participate in all important governmental decisions: legislation and judicial matters, foreign and trade policy, financial matters and the granting of privileges, etc. Above all, it was important for the council to take part in the allocation of castle and other *len* (fiefs) which were to be held by native noblemen

and not by foreigners and men of lower descent. The Scandinavian unions should be largely personal with considerable powers of self-government for each kingdom through its council.

Conversely, the monarchic agenda favoured direct royal control over castle and other *len* holders and looked to the Norwegian principle of hereditary succession as a means of reducing the dependence of the royal power on conciliar consent. From the monarchic viewpoint the unions between two or three kingdoms should be more than personal, opening each kingdom to royal rule through *len* holders of the monarch's own choice, preferably with the support of an amalgamated union council controlled by the monarch.

The two agendas should be regarded as ideal types which could never be fully realised. To integrate the huge and diverse landmass of all three Scandinavian kingdoms with their different political, social and cultural traditions into one directly ruled realm was far beyond the reach of any late medieval monarch. On the other hand, the secular and clerical aristocracy of each kingdom tended to split into factions determined by separate political interests, and there was always the need of individual noblemen and leading clerics to keep in with the king in order to promote their position in society. Consequently, a united aristocratic front for the advancement of the constitutional programme was never attainable in any kingdom and it was always possible for a monarch to find some aristocratic support for his own policy. Nevertheless, the programmes of *regimen regale* and *regimen politicum* make sense because they denote main courses followed by contemporary Scandinavian politics. Important political actors and groupings were constantly working in one or the other direction, and the shifting balance between the two agendas is an apt criterion for subdividing late medieval Scandinavian political history into main phases.

Generally, it can be said that the influence of the councils of the realms was in the ascendancy throughout most of the fourteenth century. They still played an important role in the dramatic events of 1387–9 which made Margrethe, daughter of King Valdemar IV, the regent of all three Scandinavian kingdoms and brought them together in a union that was to last for more than half a century. The reigns of Margrethe and her grand-nephew Erik of Pomerania were nevertheless the phase of late medieval union history when reality came closest to the monarchic agenda. The Act of Coronation issued at the Kalmar meeting in 1397 gave the queen and king the entire right to dispose of the Crown's castles and opened the way for the monarch to appoint castellans even beyond his own lifetime, thus pointing in the direction of a hereditary

union monarchy. The constitutional programme perceptible in the incomplete Union Document from the same occasion was set aside.

The union monarch came to reside in Denmark where a central union administration took shape. There were no autonomous central organs in Norway and Sweden where only modest functions were allowed the respective councils. Instead, the monarch tried to use the three councils as a single committee and deliberated regularly only with the Danish council. Both Margrethe and Erik sought to control the two kingdoms and obtain as much royal income as possible through the *len* system, putting royal appointees in charge of the particularly important castle *len* and at the same time carrying out a policy of extra taxation and restoration of Crown rights and property. Altogether, there was a tendency towards disintegration of the Norwegian and Swedish kingdoms within a Danish-dominated union realm.

What turned the tide against the monarchic agenda was the uncompromising course followed by King Erik in his ambitious external and internal policies. His conflicts with the counts of Holstein and the Hansa led to particularly harsh extra taxation in Sweden and impeded the Swedish export trade. At the same time his use of foreign (and native) bailiffs challenged the Swedish high nobility and contributed to his unpopularity among the broader population. Thus were triggered the Swedish risings of the 1430s and the chain of events which ended in Erik's deposition.

Faced with the Swedish rebellion Erik sought the aid of the councils of his realms, only to find that the Swedish and Danish counsellors joined each other in pursuing a programme of constitutionalism, aiming at a union of three independent kingdoms, each ruled by its council. As Erik could not bring himself to accept this, the way was opened for his deposition both in Denmark and Sweden and the election of his nephew, Christopher of Bavaria, in his place in 1439–41. The Norwegian council, traditionally loyal to the hereditary king, played a passive role in these events but finally saw no other option than to withdraw its allegiance from King Erik in 1440 and finally accept Christopher of Bavaria in 1442.

Christopher's brief reign marked the heyday of Scandinavian council constitutionalism. The ideal of a personal union of kingdoms governed independently by the councils was now realised to a higher degree than in any other period. After Christopher's unexpected death in 1448 the disputed succession kept the three councils in the political forefront. After the majority of the Swedish counsellors had decided on the former supervisor of the realm, Karl Knutsson, as their king, the Danish council fulfilled its plan of electing Count Christian of Oldenburg king of Denmark.

Faced with the two kings' claims to the throne of Norway, to which neither had hereditary right, the Norwegian council split into factions which supported the rival candidates in return for accession charters which contained far-reaching promises in the spirit of conciliar constitutionalism and heralded the change from hereditary to elective monarchy in Norway. In the end Christian prevailed, after the Swedish counsellors had abandoned Karl's claim to Norway. In 1450 he was crowned king of Norway and a union treaty was concluded between the Danish and Norwegian councils in Bergen, making Norway definitively an elective monarchy with the council as the electoral body.

As ruling king of Norway Christian I showed little inclination to respect the constitutional clauses of his accession charter and the union treaty of 1450. He rarely visited Norway, and the kingdom was ruled through a København-based chancellery government. The Norwegian council was left little part in important political decisions concerning Norwegian interests. It was ignored in 1468–9 when Orkney and Shetland were pledged to the Scottish crown for the dowry of Christian's daughter in her marriage with King James III. Christian's financial and political dependency on the Hansa also made him fail to protect Norwegian commercial interests. Though he was willing to strengthen the position of the Norwegian church, his reign (1450–81) put an end to the conciliar influence of the preceding decade.

However, Norway was of little importance to Christian in comparison with the project of winning Sweden back under the union crown. The Swedish council was in favour of a union which embodied the principles of constitutionalism and would not let the disputed election of Karl Knutsson stand in the way of such a union. Consequently, it concluded a union treaty with the Danish council in Halmstad in 1450, opening the way for the election of a common king in the future. Taken together, the Danish–Swedish Halmstad treaty and the Danish–Norwegian Bergen treaty from the same year reflect the desire of the counsellors of all three kingdoms to preserve a union based on constitutional principles.

That, however, was not the type of union in which Christian I and his Oldenburg successors on the thrones of Denmark and Norway were interested. They primarily wanted to rule Sweden according to monarchic ideals and were willing to use military means to reach that goal, but the strong Swedish forces of opposition repeatedly made them fall back on alliances with one or more of the rival factions into which the Swedish conciliar aristocracy was constantly divided, making more or less token concessions to the principles of constitutionalism. Against them were aligned, increasingly, a national Swedish

movement led by Karl Knutsson and the later Sture supervisors of the realm who made use of effective propaganda and could count on the support of the population of Dalarna, with their potential for armed revolt, and the increasingly important burghers of Stockholm with whom the metal-exporting Dalecarlians had common economic interests. There was strong opposition in the Swedish ecclesiastical and secular council aristocracy to the monarchic aspects of the policies of Karl Knutsson and the Sture supervisors but the Oldenburg monarchs were never willing to make the concessions necessary to forge more effective and lasting alliances with such forces of opposition.

Christian I initially allied himself with Karl Knutsson's Swedish opponents of the aristocratic-constitutional Oxenstierna–Vasa faction, at the same time gaining the support of the Swedish border nobility for whom peace and free connections across the Danish–Swedish border were absolutely vital. Karl was ousted and Christian elected king of Sweden in 1457 in return for constitutional guarantees which for a short time seemed to hold good. However, Christian's Swedish rule only lasted to 1464 when his policy of gaining control of the castle *len*, broadening the tax basis, and exacting harsh extra taxes made the Oxenstiernas break with him and recall Karl Knutsson.

The following years saw an internal Swedish power struggle, dominated by the interests of the Oxenstiernas, the Axelssons of the Danish Thott family, and Karl Knutsson with his followers, in which there was no longer a clear-cut division between adherents of a strong royal power and those favouring conciliar government. As Christian I had come to the conviction that he could only regain the Swedish throne by military means, and was not willing to make essential constitutional concessions, the scene was set for the bloody battle of Brunkeberg in 1471 where Christian's forces were defeated by the coalition led by Sten Sture the Elder, who had been elected supervisor of the realm after Karl Knutsson's death in the preceding year.

In the following decades Sten Sture built up his power as head of the Swedish council government in a manner that went far towards making him regent with a king-like status in the eyes of the broader population. However, the union still had prominent supporters in the Swedish council, mainly among the border nobility. The possibility of recalling Christian I in return for constitutional guarantees was kept alive for several years after Brunkeberg, and after his death in 1481 negotiations started between the councils of all three kingdoms about the acceptance of his son Hans who had in his father's lifetime been recognised as successor. The spirit of council constitutionalism was strongly revived in Hans' Danish–Norwegian accession charter, the Halmstad Recess of 1483, based on the union programme drawn up by Danish and Swedish

counsellors in the previous year. Later in 1483 the Swedish council set forth its conditions for accepting Hans in the Kalmar Recess. However, Sten Sture and his followers managed to prevent his takeover of royal power, using among other things the Gotland question against him.

In the meantime Hans strengthened the monarchy significantly both in Denmark and Norway, eroding the power of the separate institutions of the two kingdoms. There was nevertheless a certain community of interests between him and the Danish high nobility which was strong enough not to fear for its own position and saw advantages for itself in an expansive royal foreign and union policy. In Norway, the royal promises of the Halmstad Recess remained largely on parchment, as the council lacked the political apparatus to carry out its policies in practice and was at the same time weakened by the reduction in the number of the native high nobility and the king's reliance on favourites in castle *len* and as council members. The kingdom was in reality governed through the Danish chancellery without its own financial system.

For many years King Hans tried to achieve a negotiated solution of his claim to the Swedish throne, keeping in contact with the aristocratic opposition to Sten Sture in the Swedish council, but in the end he adopted an offensive alliance and war policy and in 1497, when an open conflict had broken out between Sten Sture and his opponents, he invaded Sweden. Sten Sture was forced to retire and Hans was crowned king of Sweden. However, his defeat in Ditmarschen in 1500 reinvigorated the Swedish opposition to the union and he lost most of the kingdom to Sten Sture and his followers in 1501. For the remainder of his reign there was an internal Swedish struggle between the opponents of the union, led by Sten Sture and his successor Svante Nilsson, and its conciliar adherents. The former could draw on the support of the Hansa, as King Hans worked consistently to reduce Lübeck's commercial hegemony in Scandinavia, and peace agreements acknowledging his right to the Swedish throne had no practical effect.

The Norwegian rebellion of Knut Alvsson in association with King Hans' Swedish enemies in 1501–2 was quelled, and the takeover of the government of Norway by the heir apparent Prince Christian (1506–13) meant that all opposition was harshly uprooted and the Norwegian council totally disregarded. The Danish–Norwegian accession charter issued by Christian II at his election in 1513 retained the principles of the Halmstad Recess, but had no practical effects in Norway where Christian continued to exclude the council from the government. Though the political rights of the Danish nobility were maintained and their economic privileges greatly improved in Christian's accession charter, his reign saw an increase of royal power in relation to the council in

Denmark as well, with a strengthened grip on administration and finances, use of non-noble officials in the chancellery and *len*, and favouring of urban burghers at the cost of the nobility and Church. Attempts at uniform national legislation strengthened the king's role in the enforcement of law.

A parallel strengthening of tendencies towards monarchic rule occurred in Sweden when Sten Sture the Younger was appointed supervisor of the realm after the death of his father Svante Nilsson in 1512. He worked consistently to draw the broader population to his side in more or less open opposition to the council of the realm, making use of meetings of estates and regional assemblies all over the country. Christian II, on his part, prepared a large-scale military invasion of Sweden and received increased support from Swedish opposition circles after Sten Sture deposed Archbishop Gustaf Trolle. When Christian's invasion of Sweden in 1520 led to the defeat and death of Sten Sture and ended in the surrender of Stockholm, the way seemed open to a renewal of the union much on the king's terms. However, the ensuing trial of the Sture supporters and their brutal execution in the Stockholm Massacre destroyed the basis for Christian's Swedish rule and caused the reactions that brought Gustaf Vasa to power as supervisor of the realm and later king, forever ending Sweden's participation in the Scandinavian union of which it had been a member for periods that grew shorter and shorter.

Seen in the perspective of the late medieval agendas of *regimen regale* and *regimen politicum*, it was thus the national monarchic tendencies that triumphed in Sweden at the end of the Middle Ages, enabling Gustaf Vasa to start building up the strong monarchy that was to set its stamp on Scandinavian history in the early Modern Period.

In the case of Denmark and Norway the late medieval union, now also including the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, was to last for another three centuries. Although the policies of Christian II were defeated when he left his kingdoms in 1523, monarchic rule was strengthened towards the end of the Middle Ages in Denmark and Norway, too. Here, as in Sweden, the royal power was to increase further through the Lutheran Reformation, which is the initial theme of the next volume of the *Cambridge History of Scandinavia*.

Select bibliography: primary sources, general surveys and secondary works arranged by part

Note on alphabetisation: the order of works listed below follows the Scandinavian alphabet, with æ/ä, ø/o and å coming at the end of the alphabet.

Abbreviations: The only abbreviation used in this bibliography is the commonly occurring KLM which stands for *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*.

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